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NEW LEFT REVIEW

Franco Moretti *Conjectures on World Literature*

Taggart Murphy *Japan's Economic Crisis*

Tom Nairn *Blair's Ukania*

Peter Wollen *Magritte and the Bowler Hat*

Perry Anderson *Renewals*

Henri Jacot v. Robin Blackburn

The New Collectivism?

Luisa Passerini v. Timothy Bewes

Recollecting Europe



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PERRY ANDERSON: Renewals

As *New Left Review* enters its fifth decade, a stock-taking of the journal. Where has it come from, and where is it going? How should the political and cultural scene of the nineties be assessed? A manifesto for the new series of NLR that begins with this issue.

R. TAGGART MURPHY: Japan's Economic Crisis

The 20th century's most dynamic economy has fallen into prolonged paralysis. What are the causes of Japanese stagnation, and why have the country's rulers reacted so phlegmatically to it? Taggart Murphy highlights the potentially explosive interdependency between Japanese recession and the American bull market.

FRANCO MORETTI: Conjectures on World Literature

Nearly two hundred years ago, Goethe announced the imminence of a world literature. Here Franco Moretti offers a set of hypotheses for tracking the birth and fate of the novel in the peripheries of Europe, in Latin America, Arab lands, Turkey, China, Japan, West Africa. For the first time, the prospect of a morphology of global letters?

TOM NAIRN: Ukania under Blair

Great Britain has finally yielded a parliament to Scotland. But the Labour regime in London still clings convulsively to the totems of Ukania, in Tom Nairn's savage updating of Robert Musil. New Labour's eupeptic rhetoric of youth as a sure sign of a system being wheeled into the terminal ward.

PETER WOLLEN: Magritte and the Bowler Hat

Why did Magritte populate his surrealist images with bowler hats? Peter Wollen takes us from the oneirics of the Belgian painter to the antics of Tintin and Chaplin, the purism of Le Corbusier, memories of Beckett, fantasies of Bond and Kundera. Emblem of working men and city toffs, cabaret girls and Orange parades—what icons have matched it for multiple meanings?

HENRI JACOT vs ROBIN BLACKBURN: Pension Power

Pension funds are now huge forces in Anglo-American financial markets. Could they become levers of radical socialization, if their nominal collective ownership were activated from below? Henri Jacot of the French CGT doubts it. Robin Blackburn develops his argument that they might be unexpected sources of social change.

LUISA PASSERINI vs TIMOTHY BEWES: Recollecting Europe

Luisa Passerini defends her retrieval of inter-war ideas of the unity of European culture and politics, without reference to post-war sequels, as a safeguard of actual discontinuities. Timothy Bewes argues for the difficulties of this way of looking at a past that has not gone away.

BOOK REVIEWS

SEBASTIAN BUDGEN on Luc Boltanski & Ève Chiapello, *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme*. A sequel to Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* from contemporary France.

TOM MERTES on Dick Morris, *The New Prince*. America's fallen political adviser as a surrogate Machiavelli for the White House.

GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN on Ernst Jünger–Carl Schmitt, *Briefwechsel*. Correspondence between two of Germany's most important thinkers of the radical Right.

SUSAN WATKINS on Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx*. The latest biography—a man for postmodern times?

DOREEN MASSEY on Mike Davis, *The Ecology of Fear*. Facts and phobias in Los Angeles: what constitutes a global city today.

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PERRY ANDERSON

Editorial

RENEWALS

THE LIFE-SPAN OF JOURNALS is no warrant of their achievement. A couple of issues, and abrupt extinction, can count for more in the history of a culture than a century of continuous publication. In its three years, the *Athenaeum* put German Romanticism into orbit. The fireworks of the *Revue Blanche*, the first journal of a modern avant-garde, lit Paris for barely a decade. *Lef* closed after seven issues in Moscow. These were reviews at the intersection of aesthetic innovation with philosophy and politics. Journals of criticism have often survived longer—*The Criterion*, in various incarnations, for most of the inter-war period, *Scrutiny* from the thirties into the fifties. Reasons for closure might be external, even accidental, but typically the vitality of a journal is tied to those who create it. In heroic cases, a single individual can defy time with the composition of a personal monument: Kraus writing *Die Fackel* alone for twenty-five years, Croce rivalling the feat with *La Critica*. Usually, life-cycles of journals are more adventitious and dispersed. Editors quarrel, change their minds, get bored or go bankrupt, for the most part well before they go to the grave themselves.

A political journal is as subject to the incidents of mortality as any other. In one respect, more so—since politics is always a *Kampfplatz*, a field of division, breaking ties and forcing conflicts. Wreckage through disputes or scissions is more frequent here than anywhere else. In other respects, however, political journals have a different reason for being, that makes renewal beyond their first impetus a test specific to them. They stand both for certain objective principles, and the capacity of these to decipher the course of the world. Here, editorial fade-out is intellectual defeat. Material or institutional pressures may, of course, cut off any periodical

in its prime. But short of such circumstances, political journals have no choice: to be true to themselves, they must aim to extend their real life beyond the conditions or generations that gave rise to them.

This journal, now entering its fifth decade, has reached such a point. Forty years is a significant span of activity, though not an extraordinary one—*Les Temps Modernes*, from which NLR learnt a good deal in its early days, has lasted much longer. But it is sufficient to call for an overhaul. With this issue, we start a new series of the journal marked by a break of numerals, in keeping with radical tradition, and a redesign of its appearance, in token of changes to come. Charged for the moment with the transition to another style of review, not to be achieved overnight, I set out below my own view of the situation of NLR today, and the directions it should begin to take. Billed as an ‘editorial’, the result is nonetheless a personal—and therefore provisional—statement: open to contradiction. So too will be the editorials that follow in each issue, written on topics of their choice by others, without presumption of any automatic agreement.

I

Any consideration of the future of NLR must start from its *differentia specifica*. What has made it distinctive as a journal of the Left? There would be a number of ways of answering this, but the simplest and most succinct is this. No other such review has attempted to publish across the same range of terrain—stretching from politics to economics to aesthetics to philosophy to sociology—with the same freedoms of length and detail, where required. This span has never been evenly or regularly explored, and the difficulties of moving between such completely discrepant registers of writing have consistently been scanted, to the cost of even the most patient readers. But here is where the character of *New Left Review* has effectively been defined. It is a political journal based in London that has tried to treat social and moral sciences —‘theory’, if you will—and arts and mores—‘culture’, for short—in the same historical spirit as politics itself. The best way of grasping the present situation of the review is to look back at the context in which the format of NLR was originally conceived, that made possible the combination of these interests. The conjuncture of the early sixties, when the review took shape under a new collective, offered the following features:

- ▶ Politically, a third of the planet had broken with capitalism. Few had any doubts about the enormities of Stalin's rule, or the lack of democracy in any of the countries that described themselves as socialist. But the Communist bloc, even at its moment of division, was still a dynamic reality—Isaac Deutscher, writing in *NLR*, could take the Sino-Soviet split as a sign of vitality.¹ Khrushchev, viewed as a 'revolutionary romantic' by current historians of Russia, held out promise of reform in the USSR. The prestige of Maoist China was largely intact. The Cuban Revolution was a new beacon in Latin America. The Vietnamese were successfully fighting the United States in South-East Asia. Capitalism, however stable and prosperous in its Northern heartlands, was—and felt itself to be—under threat across the larger part of the world outside them. Even at home, in Western Europe and Japan, mass Communist movements were still ranged against the existing order.

- ▶ Intellectually, the discredit of Stalinist orthodoxy after 1956 and the decline of domestic Cold War conformity after 1958 released a discovery process of suppressed leftist and Marxist traditions that, in starved British conditions, took on aspects of a theoretical fever. Alternative strands of a revolutionary Marxism linked to mass politics—Luxemburgist, Trotskyist, Maoist, Council Communist—started to circulate. Simultaneously, the various legacies of a Western Marxism born from the defeat of mass politics—from the era of Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci onwards—became available for recovery. Crucial to the influence of these Western traditions was its continuity into the present: Sartre, Lefebvre, Adorno, Marcuse, Della Volpe, Colletti, Althusser were contemporary authors, producing new texts as *NLR* was sending its numbers to press. British isolation from such continental patterns made sudden, concentrated encounter with them all the headier.

- ▶ Culturally, exit from the conformist atmosphere of the fifties was a much broader phenomenon than this, and the rupture just as abrupt. The two dominant markers of the period were the emergence of rock music as a pervasive sound-wave of youth revolt, in contrast to the generally saccharine output of the previous period—a popular form laying claim to both aesthetic breakthrough and social upsurge.

¹ 'Three Currents in Communism', *NLR* 23, Jan–Feb 1964.

Britain was itself the leading country in this transformation, whose shock-effects were not yet routinized, as they later became. The second critical shift was the emergence of *auteur* cinema, as conception and project. Here the influence of *Cahiers du Cinema* and the *Nouvelle Vague* that came out of it was decisive. In this reception, the position accorded classic Hollywood directors by French cineastes opened a loop that defined much of the period. In effect, the new ascendance of cinema and music set free a dialectic between 'high' and 'low' planes of reference in the cultural life of the sixties that looks retrospectively distinctive. Playful or serious, the ease of traffic between the two—an absence of strain—owed much to the most important theoretical current of the time, aside from Marxism, which was structuralism. The moment of the early Barthes or Lévi-Strauss (*Mythologies* or *Tristes Tropiques*), bringing a common method to the study of each, was critical for the mediation between high and low forms. Recuperating the legacy of Russian formalism, this was a structuralism whose concerns were still perfectly congruent with those of the cultural Left.

2

In this triple context, NLR undertook a range of programmes that at the time were innovatory for the English-speaking world. Politically, the review set its compass towards anti-imperialist movements in the Third World, and while parochial reflexes were still strong on the British Left, gathered a team whose interests eventually spanned most of the world—Latin America, Black Africa, the Middle East, South Asia and the Far East were all represented. At home, a set of distinctive arguments about the UK was developed, which came to have a certain influence. So when the explosion of the late sixties, triggered by the war in Vietnam, occurred in the West—first student rebellion, then labour upsurge—NLR was well placed to play some role in the ensuing tumult, and to gain an international readership by the mid-seventies.

Intellectually, the journal devoted much of its energies to the introduction and critical reception of the different schools of Western Marxist thought, a sufficiently large enterprise to occupy it for over a decade. Structuralism, formalism, psychoanalysis featured too—canonical texts or sources often first surfacing in its pages. On these fronts NLR was well ahead of the surrounding culture, pioneering a more cosmopolitan

and radical horizon of reference than was easily available elsewhere in the Anglophone world.

Culturally, too, the review developed new styles of intervention, linking interest in traditional arts to engagement with avant-garde forms, and interventions on popular cinema or music. Peter Wollen's famous series on film directors, or—say—Franco Moretti's 'Dialectic of Fear', exemplified the freedom of movement between 'high' and 'low' terrains. The initiatives released by this ferment escaped narrow classification. NLR was premonitory both of the seventies' rediscovery of feminism, and the eighties' rediscovery of work, in the same few years. It was a creative period.

3

Four decades later, the environment in which NLR took shape has all but completely passed away. The Soviet bloc has disappeared. Socialism has ceased to be a widespread ideal. Marxism is no longer a dominant in the culture of the Left. Even Labourism has largely dissolved. To say that these changes are enormous would be an under-statement. It cannot be maintained they reduced the review to silence. Each in their fashion, writers associated with it have responded with spirit to the conjuncture of '89. Texts in different registers would include Robin Blackburn's 'Fin-de-Siècle: Socialism After the Crash'; Peter Wollen's 'Our Post-Communism: The Legacy of Karl Kautsky'; Alexander Cockburn's *The Golden Age is Within Us*; Fred Halliday's 'The Ends of Cold War'; Tom Nairn's *Faces of Nationalism*; Benedict Anderson's 'Radicalism after Communism'; Tariq Ali's *Fear of Mirrors*; and the list could be lengthened.² It would be interesting to trace the variety of these reactions, and of other contributors published by the review. Judgements of each will differ. But as a whole the tradition of the journal acquitted itself without dishonour.

Ten years after the collapse of Communism, however, the world has moved on, and a condition of re-launching the review is some distinc-

² Respectively: NLR 185, Jan–Feb 1991 (Blackburn); NLR 202, Nov–Dec 1993 (Wollen); Verso 1994 (Cockburn); NLR 180, Mar–Apr 1990 (Halliday); Verso 1997 (Nairn); NLR 202, Nov–Dec 1993 (Anderson); Arcadia 1998 (Ali).

tive and systematic approach to its state today. What is the principal aspect of the past decade? Put briefly, it can be defined as the virtually uncontested consolidation, and universal diffusion, of neo-liberalism. This was not so widely predicted. If the years 1989–91 saw the destruction of Soviet-bloc Communism, it was not immediately obvious—even to its champions—that unfettered free-market capitalism would sweep the board in East or West. Many East European dissidents, West European progressives, North American conservatives, foresaw some kind of ‘re-balancing’ of the global landscape—the Left perhaps gaining a fresh lease of life, once released from the crippling moral legacy of Stalinism, and Japanese or Rhenish corporatism proving superior in both social equity and economic efficiency to Wall Street or the City. These were not isolated beliefs, and could draw on authorities of distinction. As late as 1998, Eric Hobsbawm and former *Marxism Today* writers were still hopefully proclaiming the end of neo-liberalism.³

In fact, the trend of the time has moved in the opposite direction. Five inter-linked developments have changed the scene quite drastically:

- ▶ American capitalism has resoundingly re-asserted its primacy in all fields—economic, political, military, cultural—with an unprecedented eight-year boom. However inflated are asset values on Wall Street, burdened with debt private households, or large the current trade deficits, there is little doubt that the underlying competitive position of US business has been critically strengthened.
- ▶ European social-democracy, having taken power across the Union, has responded to continent-wide slow growth and high unemployment by across-the-board moves towards an American model—accelerating deregulation and privatization not only of industries but also social services, often well beyond the limits of previous conservative regimes. Britain had a head-start in deregulation, but Germany and Italy are now bidding to catch up, and France lags more in words than deeds.
- ▶ Japanese capitalism has fallen into a deep slump, and—along with Korean—is being gradually pressured to submit to deregulatory standards, with increasing unemployment. Elsewhere in Asia, the

3 ‘The Death of Neo-Liberalism’, *Marxism Today* one-issue revenant, Nov–Dec 1998.

PRC is eager to enter the WTO at virtually any price, in the hope that competitive pressures from foreign capital will weed out state industries, without having itself to take responsibility for their fate; while India is for the first time now willingly dependent on the IMF.

- The new Russian economy, the weakest link in the global market system, has provoked no popular backlash, despite catastrophic regression in productive output and life-expectation. Stabilization of its financial oligarchy under a plebiscitary leadership, capable of centralizing power and privatizing land, is now in prospect.

These are massive socio-economic changes, working their way across the globe, which have already found canonization in Daniel Yergin and Joseph Stanislaw's enthusiastic survey *The Commanding Heights*. They have been accompanied by two complementary, political and military, shifts:

- Ideologically, the neo-liberal consensus has found a new point of stabilization in the 'Third Way' of the Clinton–Blair regimes. The winning formula to seal the victory of the market is not to attack, but to preserve, the placebo of a compassionate public authority, extolling the compatibility of competition with solidarity. The hard core of government policies remains further pursuit of the Reagan–Thatcher legacy, on occasion with measures their predecessors did not dare enact: welfare reform in the US, student fees in the UK. But it is now carefully surrounded with subsidiary concessions and softer rhetoric. The effect of this combination, currently being diffused throughout Europe, is to suppress the conflictual potential of the pioneering regimes of the radical right, and kill off opposition to neo-liberal hegemony more completely. One might say that, by definition, TINA only acquires full force once an alternative regime demonstrates that there are truly no alternative policies. For the quietus to European social-democracy or the memory of the New Deal to be consummated, governments of the Centre-Left were indispensable. In this sense, adapting Lenin's maxim that 'the democratic republic is the ideal political shell of capitalism', we could say that the Third Way is the best ideological shell of neo-liberalism today. It is scarcely an accident that the most ambitious and intransigent theorization of ultra-capitalism as a global order, Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive-Tree*, should at the same time be a brazen paean to US world hegemony,

and an unconditional advocacy of Clintonism, under the slogan 'one dare not be a globalizer today without being a social-democrat'.⁴

- Finally, the Balkan War has rounded off the decade with a military-diplomatic demonstration of the ascendancy of this constellation. Comparison with the Gulf War suggests how much stronger the New World Order has become since the early nineties. Bush had to mobilize a vast army to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, in the name of protecting Western oil supplies and a feudal dynasty; without succeeding in either overthrowing the regime in Baghdad, or drawing Russia—still unpredictable—into the alliance against it. Clinton has bombed Serbia into submission without so much as a soldier having to fire a shot, in the name of a moral imperative to stop ethnic cleansing, that is likely to conclude in short order with a removal of the regime in Belgrade; and brigaded Russia effortlessly into the occupation force as a token auxiliary. Meanwhile China, after the destruction of its embassy—on the heels of a respectful visit by its Premier to the US—has cooperated meekly in setting up a UN screen for the NATO protectorate in Kosovo, and made clear that nothing will be allowed to disturb good relations with Washington. For its part, the European Union is basking in a new comradeship-in-arms with the United States, and joint purpose in generous reconstruction of the Balkans. Victory in Kosovo has in this sense not been just military and political. It is also an ideological triumph, that sets a new standard for interventions on behalf of human rights—as construed in Washington: Chechens or Palestinians need not apply—around the world. The society created by the capitalist free-for-all of the past twenty years was in need of a good conscience. Operation Allied Force has provided it.

4

The intellectual atmosphere in the advanced countries, and extending well beyond them, reflects these changes. If the bulk of the Western intelligentsia was always substantially satisfied with the status quo, with

⁴ *The Lexus and Olive-Tree*, New York 1999, p. 354. In similar vein, Yergin and Stanislaw end their glowing tour of the world-wide triumph of markets with a concluding homage to Blair's 'great accomplishment in fusing social-democratic values of fairness and inclusiveness with the Thatcherite economic programme': *The Commanding Heights*, New York 1999, p. 390.

a more restless and imaginative minority flanking it to the right, the left was still a significant presence in most of the leading capitalist states down through the eighties, even if there were important national variations—the British becoming less conservative, as the French or Italians became more so, and so forth. With the homogenization of the political scene in the nineties, one would expect there to have been a *Gleichschaltung* of acceptable opinion as well. By the end of the decade, this has gathered pace. If we look at the spectrum of what was the traditional—formerly socialist—Left, two types of reaction to the new conjuncture predominate.

The first is accommodation. In its hour of general triumph, capitalism has convinced many who at one time believed it an avoidable evil that it is a necessary and on balance salutary social order. Those who have rallied, explicitly or tacitly, to the Third Way are obvious examples. But the range of guises in which accommodation can be reached are much wider, and are quite compatible with a sceptical or even derisive view of official—Blumenthal—Campbell—oleographs of the new order: extending from frank acknowledgement of a down-the-line superiority of private enterprise, without mollifying embellishments, to simple dropping of the subject of property regimes altogether. One consequence of the shift in the ideological climate at large is that it becomes decreasingly necessary even to express a position on these issues, as they fall outside the perimeter of significant debate. Clamorous renegacy is quite rare; the commoner pattern is just changing the subject. But the depth of actual accommodation can be seen from episodes like the Balkan War, where the role of NATO was simply taken for granted, as a normal and desirable part of the political universe, by a wide band of opinion that would not have dreamt of doing so ten or twenty years back. The underlying attitude is: capitalism has come to stay, we must make our peace with it.

The second type of reaction can best be described as one of consolation.⁵ Here there is no unprincipled accommodation—earlier ideals are not abandoned, and may even be staunchly reaffirmed. But faced with

⁵ It is a matter of logic that there is a third possible reaction to the turn of the time, that is neither accommodation or consolation: namely, resignation—in other words, a lucid recognition of the nature and triumph of the system, without either adaptation or self-deception, but also without any belief in the chance of an alternative to it. A bitter conclusion of this kind is, however, rarely articulated as a public position.

daunting odds, there is a natural human tendency to try and find silver linings in what would otherwise seem an overwhelmingly hostile environment. The need to have some message of hope induces a propensity to over-estimate the significance of contrary processes, to invest inappropriate agencies with disinterested potentials, to nourish illusions in imaginary forces. Probably none of us on the Left is immune to this temptation, which can even claim some warrant from the general rule of the unintended consequences flowing from any historical transformation—the dialectical sense in which victories can unexpectedly generate victors over them. It is also true that no political movement can survive without offering some measure of emotional relief to its adherents, which in periods of defeat will inevitably involve elements of psychological compensation. But an intellectual journal has other duties. Its first commitment must be to an accurate description of the world, no matter what its bearing on morale may be. All the more so, because there is an intermediate terrain in which consolation and accommodation can overlap—that is, wherever changes in the established order calculated to fortify its hold are greeted as steps towards its loosening, or perhaps even a qualitative transformation of the system. Russell Jacoby's recent *End of Utopia* offers trenchant reflections on some of this.

5

What kind of stance should NLR adopt in this new situation? Its general approach, I believe, should be an uncompromising realism. Uncompromising in both senses: refusing any accommodation with the ruling system, and rejecting every piety and euphemism that would understate its power. No sterile *maximalism* follows. The journal should always be in sympathy with strivings for a better life, no matter how modest their scope. But it can support any local movements or limited reforms, without pretending that they alter the nature of the system. What it cannot—or should not—do is either lend credence to illusions that the system is moving in a steadily progressive direction, or sustain conformist myths that it urgently needs to be shielded from reactionary forces: attitudes on display, to take two recent examples, in the rallying to Princess and President by the *bien-pensant* left, as if the British monarchy needed to be more popular or the American Presidency more protected. Hysteria of this kind should be sharply attacked.

Appeals to venerable traditions or established institutions to—so to speak—live up to their own standards, form a different sort of case. A great deal of the best writing on the Left today seeks to take the ruling conventions at their word—treating official hypocrisy, the gap between word and deed, as the homage vice must pay to virtue, that promises a happy ending. This was the approach classically favoured, and eloquently practised, by the first New Left. Many contributions to the journal will continue to be couched in these terms, and should be judged on their—often considerable—merits. There is, however, a risk in this style of address. The line between the desirable and the feasible may be left unclear, allowing mystification about the realities of power, and what can rationally be expected of it. It is best to leave no ambiguity here. The test of NLR's capacity to strike a distinctive political note should be how often it can calmly shock readers by calling a spade a spade, rather than falling in with well-meaning cant or self-deception on the Left. The spirit of the Enlightenment rather than the Evangelicals is what is most needed today.

6

A decade does not make an epoch. The neo-liberal grand slam of the nineties is no guarantee of perpetual power. In a longer historical perspective, a more sanguine reading of the time can be made. This, after all, has also been a period in which the Suharto dictatorship has been overthrown in Indonesia, clerical tyranny weakened in Iran, a venal oligarchy ousted in Venezuela, apartheid ended in South Africa, assorted generals and their civilian relays brought low in Korea, liberation finally won in East Timor. These were not movements that enjoyed the confidence of investors in the West, as the spring-time of peoples in Europe had done. An optimistic view would take them as the seeds of a reckoning to come—the latest acts of a continuing emancipation of nations that constitutes the real process of democratization on a world scale, whose outcome we can barely yet imagine. Another version would point rather to the general weakening in the hierarchy of the sexes, with world-wide pressures for women's emancipation, as the leading story of the age; or to the growth in ecological consciousness, to which even the most hardened states must now pay formal respect. Common to all these visions is an intimation that capitalism may be invincible, but might

eventually prove soluble—or forgettable—in the waters of profounder kinds of equality, sustainability and self-determination.

If so, such deeps still remain unfathomable. The spread of democracy as a substitute for socialism, as hope or claim, is mocked by the hollowing of democracy itself in its capitalist homelands, not to speak of its post-communist adjuncts: steadily falling rates of electoral participation, increasing financial corruption, deadening mediatization. In general, what is strong is not democratic aspiration from below, but the asphyxiation of public debate and political difference by capital above. The force of this order lies not in repression, but dilution and neutralization; and so far, it has handled its newer challenges with equanimity. The gains made by the feminist and ecological movements in the advanced world are real and welcome: the most important elements of human progress in these societies of the last thirty years. But to date they have proved compatible with the routines of accumulation. Logically, a good measure of political normalization has followed. The performance of feminists in the United States, and Greens in Germany—where each movement is strongest—in the service of Clinton's regimen in the White House and NATO's war in the Balkans speaks for itself.

This is not to say that any other force in the advanced capitalist countries has shown a greater quotient of effective antagonism to the status quo. With rare exceptions—France in the winter of 1995—labour has been quiescent for over twenty years now. Its condition is not a mere outcome of economic changes or ideological shifts. Harsh class struggles were necessary to subdue it in Britain as the United States. If somewhat less cowed in Europe, workers still remain everywhere on the defensive. The only starting-point for a realistic Left today is a lucid registration of historical defeat. Capital has comprehensively beaten back all threats to its rule, the bases of whose power—above all, the pressures of competition—were persistently under-estimated by the socialist movement. The doctrines of the Right that have theorized capitalism as a systemic order retain their tough-minded strength; current attempts by a self-styled radical Centre to dress up its realities are by comparison little more than weak public relations. Those who always believed in the over-riding value of free markets and private ownership of the means of production include many figures of intellectual substance. The recent crop of bowdlerizers and beauticians, who only yesterday deplored the ugliness of the system they primp today, do not.

For the Left, the lesson of the past century is one taught by Marx. Its first task is to attend to the actual development of capitalism as a complex machinery of production and profit, in constant motion. Robert Brenner's 'Economics of Global Turbulence', taking up an issue of NLR, sets the appropriate example.⁶ No collective agency able to match the power of capital is yet on the horizon. We are in a time, as genetic engineering looms, when the only revolutionary force at present capable of disturbing its equilibrium appears to be scientific progress itself—the forces of production, so unpopular with Marxists convinced of the primacy of relations of production when a socialist movement was still alive. But if the human energies for a change of system are ever released again, it will be from within the metabolism of capital itself. We cannot turn away from it. Only in the evolution of this order could lie the secrets of another one. This is the sense of enquiries like those by Robin Blackburn in NLR into the trend of financial institutions.⁷ There are no certainties here; so far, all that is possible are proposals and conjectures.

7

Ideologically, the novelty of the present situation stands out in historical view. It can be put like this. For the first time since the Reformation, there are no longer any significant oppositions—that is, systematic rival outlooks—within the thought-world of the West; and scarcely any on a world scale either, if we discount religious doctrines as largely inoperative archaisms, as the experiences of Poland or Iran indicate we may. Whatever limitations persist to its practice, neo-liberalism as a set of principles rules undivided across the globe: the most successful ideology in world history. What this means for a journal like NLR is a radical discontinuity in the culture of the Left, as it—or if it—renews itself generationally. Nowhere is the contrast with the originating context of the review sharper than in this respect. Virtually the entire horizon of reference in which the generation of the sixties grew up has been wiped away—the landmarks of reformist and revolutionary socialism in equal measure. For most students, the roster of Bebel, Bernstein, Luxemburg, Kautsky, Jaurès, Lukács, Lenin, Trotsky, Gramsci have become names as remote as a list of Arian bishops. How to reweave threads of significance

⁶ NLR 229, May–June 1998; an expanded version will appear as a Verso book.

⁷ 'The New Collectivism', NLR 233, Jan–Feb 1999.

between the last century and this would be one of the most delicate and difficult tasks before any journal that took the term 'left' seriously. There seem to be few guide-posts for it.

If we look at the intellectual traditions closest in time and influence to the early NLR, the situation does not at first look much better. Most of the corpus of Western Marxism has also gone out of general circulation—Korsch, the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, most of Sartre and Althusser, the Della Volpean school, Marcuse. What has survived best is least directly political: essentially, post-war Frankfurt theory and selected Benjamin. Domestically, Raymond Williams has been put out of court, much as Wright Mills in America twenty years ago; Deutsch er has disappeared; the name Miliband speaks of another time.

On the other hand, the history of ideas is not a Darwinian process. Major systems of thought rarely disappear, as if they were so many species become extinct. Though no longer seen within any coherent context, strands of these traditions have continued to show remarkable vitality. It could be said that British Marxist historiography has now achieved a world readership, something it never knew before, with Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes*—which seems likely to remain the most influential single interpretation of the past century well into this one, as the overall history of a victory from the viewpoint of the vanquished. Jameson's work on the postmodern, descending directly from Continental Marxism, has no exact counterpart as a cultural version of the age. Robert Brenner has provided the only coherent economic account of capitalist development since the Second World War, Giovanni Arrighi the most ambitious projection of its evolution in a longer timeframe. Tom Nairn and Benedict Anderson are leading voices on the political ambiguities of modern nationalism. Régis Debray has developed one of the most systematic theories of the contemporary media now on offer. Terry Eagleton in the literary field, T. J. Clark in the visual arts, David Harvey in the reconstruction of geography, are central figures for all concerned with these disciplines.

It is enough to list such names to see that no forcible unification of them into a single paradigm is conceivable. The span of different methods, interests and accents is far too wide. If that is in part a consequence of the fragmentation of the culture of the Left, it is also an expression of a creative disinhibition and diversification of lines of enquiry. Respect-

ing these, the review should seek to present an intelligible landscape, in which such bodies of work have an accessible relationship to one another.

At the same time, there is a wider intellectual spectrum with few or no Marxist origins, defining itself as loosely on the left, that is in movement today. Taking the fields of philosophy, sociology and economics, it would include the work of Habermas, Derrida, Barry, Bourdieu, Mann, Runciman; Stiglitz, Sen, Dasgupta. Here criss-crossing shifts of position can be seen, previously moderate thinkers becoming radicalized as neo-liberal hegemony has become more absolute, while others once more radical have become reconciled to elements of the conventional wisdom. But more significant than these eddies is a common feature of much of this range of work: the combination of bold intellectual ambition and broad disciplinary synthesis with timorous or truistic commitments in the political field itself—a far cry from the robust and passionate world of Weber, Keynes or Russell. Here the consequences of the uprooting of all the continuities of a socialist tradition, however indirectly related to, are very visible. The result is typically a spectacle of impressive theoretical energy and productivity, whose social sum is significantly less than its intellectual parts.

By contrast, commanding the field of direct political constructions of the time, the Right has provided one fluent vision of where the world is going, or has stopped, after another—Fukuyama, Brzezinski, Huntington, Yergin, Luttwak, Friedman. These are writers that unite a single powerful thesis with a fluent popular style, designed not for an academic readership but a broad international public. This confident genre, of which America has so far a virtual monopoly, finds no equivalent on the Left. There, at best, normative schemes of a ‘cosmopolitan democracy’ or ‘law of peoples’, bracketing or euphemizing the actual course of things, remain the lame alternative. NLR has not engaged much with either. This ought to be one of its priorities. It is unlikely the balance of intellectual advantage will alter greatly before there is a change in the political correlation of forces, which will probably remain stable so long as there is no deep economic crisis in the West. Little short of a slump of inter-war proportions looks capable of shaking the parameters of the current consensus. But that is no reason to mark time—polemical or analytical—in the interim.

The cultural scene, too, bears little resemblance to that in which the early NLR flourished. Three major changes have defined the interval. First, there has been a massive displacement of dominance from verbal to visual codes, with the primacy of television over every preceding means of communication, followed by the rise of subsequent electronic media in which the same shift has been technologically replicated. This pattern has, of course, defined the arrival of postmodern forms at large. Secondly—another hallmark of the latter—most of the tension between deviant or insurgent impulses from below and the established order above has been absorbed, as the market has appropriated and institutionalized youth culture in much the same way it earlier encapsulated avant-garde practices: but—this being a mass market—much more thoroughly. The commodity apotheosis of idols like Jackson or Jordan are the upshot. Thirdly, the voltage connecting high and low systems, whose circuit was such a feature of the modern period, has been shorted as the distance that was a condition of it has tended to collapse. The effect is mutual caricature, as the two converge on common terrain: slumming at the Royal Academy, and pretention at the Oscars—*Sensation* and *Dreamworks* as obverse forms of kitsch. Literature, dragged into the same vortex by prize-money and publicity budgets, generates Eco or late Rushdie.

For the journal, it is the critical side of the situation that matters. Here the pattern on the side of production has been inverted. Where once there was lively interchange between high and low levels, a polarization has occurred that tends to leave each sealed in hypertrophied discourses of their own. Thus high forms have fallen prey to tortuous routines of philosophical deconstruction, while popular forms have become the playground of 'cultural studies' of a sub-sociological type. Each has origins in radical lines of work in the late fifties and sixties: Hoggart and Williams on one side, Bataille to Derrida on the other. Formally speaking, the respective mutations continue to identify themselves, for the most part, with the Left: indeed, in grander moments—as critics on the Right are quick to point out—virtually as the Left, at any rate in America. What they too often amount to, however, is a choice between obscurantism and populism, or—still worse—a mixture of the two, parading a weird blend of the demagogic and apolitical.

Obscurantism as wilful impediment of meaning has few defenders. Populism, on the other hand, is sometimes thought to have progressive potential. But if we set aside its legendary origins in Russia, where the Narodniks would be regarded by current standards as thoroughly elitist, what populism typically means today is faking an equality of condition—between voters, readers or viewers—that does not exist, the better to pass over actual inequalities of knowledge or literacy: ground on which a cynical right and pious left all too easily meet. It is thus not surprising that of the two hermeneutics on offer, cultural studies is currently the more influential, and in its deteriorated forms the main obstacle to any recreation of an unselfconscious sense of movement between high and low. Commendable exercises in the analysis of mass culture are not lacking, in which the original intentions behind the Hoggart-Williams line have continued. All too many, however, of the progeny of the Birmingham School have lurched towards an uncritical embrace of the market as zestful fount of popular culture. In these conditions, the role of NLR should be to bend the stick resolutely in the opposite direction, while avoiding any neo-Leavisite overtones. Julian Stallabrass's contributions to the review have struck a requisite note, engaging critically both with the newest electronic media, at the level of the games arcade, and with the newest British painting, as it—in every sense—plays to the gallery.

In any radical journal, tension is always likely between two forms of criticism, equally necessary yet markedly distinct. One can think of these as, roughly speaking, 'avant-garde' and 'hegelian' approaches to culture—the first committed to staking out an aggressive, even if one-sided imperative stance, the second to deciphering in more indicative mood the historical or philosophical intelligibility of a wider scene: Clement Greenberg and Fredric Jameson as respective virtuosos. The two styles are not exclusive, and the review should encourage both. The need for one or the other varies, inevitably, according to topic or conjuncture. In an area like the cinema, earnest reflections on the meaning of the latest box-office hit from Hollywood or Elstree, even if well-aimed, are a waste of NLR's space, compared with treatment of directors, above all outside the Anglophone world, who are short of attention or difficult to see. For, counter-balancing the negative developments in the metropolitan zone of the past period, there has been one enormous cultural gain at large—the multiplication of peripheral producers in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America. This is very poorly covered in the West, and should be a priority for the Left to address. One good text on Hou Xiao Xien,

Kiarostami, Sembene, Leduc is worth a hundred—no matter how critical—on Spielberg or Coppola. A sequence along these lines, extended to the new European cinema (Amelio, Reitz, Jacquot, Zonka), would be the natural successor to Peter Wollen's path-breaking series in the early NLR.

More generally, the kind of literary geography Franco Moretti has been developing, because it focuses on the market as well as the morphology of forms, provides a natural bridge between elite and mass zones of culture, as well as, most recently, an 'outward turn' to global systems that offers a model of another kind. In all fields, NLR should try to counter the provincialism—actually, narcissism—of the English-speaking world, by focusing, if necessary more than proportionately, on non-Anglophone works and producers. One of the most striking features of the current English scene (*a fortiori* American too) is that although foreign languages, literatures and politics are much more widely learnt in schools and universities than they were twenty years ago, the cultural references of the newest generations—even at their most sophisticated—are often narrower, because the hegemony of Hollywood, CNN and Bookerism has increased exponentially in the interim. A glance at the slipstream of current journalistic fashions is enough to register the paradox. In keeping with its tradition, the review should resist this involution.

9

Editing a journal with this set of concerns has always been a tightrope affair. To achieve a balance between such disparate fields as the economic and the aesthetic, the sociological and the philosophical, would be tricky enough in itself. Here they come together, by the nature of the review, under the primacy of the political, that poses its own problems of definition and selection. The order of the journal tacitly reflects its organizing focus, editorials or lead articles normally dealing with international issues of the day. NLR remains first and foremost a political journal, outside any polite consensus or established perimeters of opinion. But this is not a politics that absorbs the domains it touches on. The culture of any society always exceeds the spectrum of politics active within it, as a reservoir of meanings of which only a delimited range have to do with the distribution of power, that is the object of political

action.⁸ An effective politics respects that excess. Attempts to conscript any theoretical or cultural field for instrumental purposes will always be futile or counter-productive. That does not mean indifference. The Left needs a 'cultural politics'; but what that signifies first of all is a widening of the limits of its own culture. It follows that NLR will publish articles regardless of their immediate relationship, or lack of it, to familiar radical agendas.

A major change of the past epoch, often remarked upon, has been the widespread migration of intellectuals of the Left into institutions of higher learning. This development—a consequence not only of changes in occupational structure, but of the emptying-out of political organizations, the dumbing-down of publishing houses, the stunting of counter-cultures—is unlikely to be soon reversed. It has brought with it, notoriously, specific tares. Edward Said has recently drawn attention sharply to some of the worst of these—standards of writing that would have left Marx or Morris speechless. But academization has taken its toll in other ways too: needless apparatuses, more for credential than intellectual purposes, circular references to authorities, complaisant self-citations, and so on. Wherever appropriate, NLR aims to be a scholarly journal; but not an academic one. Unlike most academic—not to speak of other—journals today, it does not shove notes to the end of articles, or resort to sub-literate 'Harvard' references, but respects the classical courtesy of footnotes at the bottom of the page, as indicators of sources or tangents to the text, immediately available to the reader. Where they are necessary, authors can be as free with them as Moretti is in this issue. But mere proliferation for its own sake, a plague of too many submissions today, will not pass. It should be a matter of honour on the Left to write at least as well, without redundancy or clutter, as its adversaries.

The journal will feature a regular book-review section, and encourage polemical exchange. NLR has always enjoyed an undeserved comparative advantage in the language in which it is published, since English has a world-wide audience that no other idiom possesses. By way of compensation, it should try to bring to the notice of its readers important works that are not published in English, as well as those that are. The

⁸ The outstanding argument for the asymmetry of culture and politics is to be found in Francis Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time*, Cork 1998, pp. 6–7, 52–53, a book to which the review will return in a forthcoming issue.

reviews in this issue offer an improvised sample of what we might do. Of polemics in its pages, the journal has traditionally had too few. We hope to change this. The current number contains a pair, as will the next. Here, as elsewhere, the criterion is not political correctness, however construed, but originality and vigour of argument. There is no requirement of contributors that they be conventionally of the Left—there are many areas, perhaps especially in the field of international relations, where arguments against standard progressive pieties, usually shared by pillars of respectable liberalism, are superior to them. The most devastating criticisms of the expansion of NATO and the war in the Balkans often came from the Right. The review should welcome interventions like these. By contrast, surplus to requirements are apologia for official policies from the Left, of which quite a few were to be heard as the B-52s took off for Kuwait or Kosovo. These are available any day in the establishment press. The value of polemical exchange here should be to lie clear of this chloroformed zone.

Finally, a word on location. NLR was a journal conceived in Britain, a state we must hope will not last much longer, for the reasons trenchantly set out by Tom Nairn. It has had much to say about the UK, and will not stop now. At the same time, many of its editors today live or work in the US, about which the journal has also published a good deal. Over two decades, writing on America by Mike Davis—its most consistent contributor—has left an indelible mark. There is also the European background that stimulated most of the initiating ideas of the review. The scope of NLR has always been wider than this Western base-line. But while the journal has covered the rest of the world—Third and Second, as well as First, while these terms still held—for better or worse according to period, its writers have continued to come essentially from its homelands. This we would like to change. The time should come when the contributors to NLR are as extra-Atlantic as its contents. For the moment, that is out of reach. But it is a horizon to bear in mind.

R. TAGGART MURPHY

JAPAN'S ECONOMIC CRISIS

JAPAN'S TROUBLES have persisted now for nearly a decade. That the world's second largest economy and leading net creditor should remain mired in seemingly endless stagnation/recession confounds policy makers and observers around the globe. And their fears over the consequences have deepened since the onset of the developing world crisis in July 1997. It is evident that the United States alone cannot generate sufficient demand to pull the developing world out of the doldrums—that it requires the assistance of other leading economic powers. With a Europe preoccupied for the time being with its new currency, the only sizeable power left to help the United States propel the world forward is Japan. Yet far from being part of the solution, Japan appears to be a big part of the problem.

Complaints about Japan have become numbingly familiar. According to widely accepted conventional wisdom, Tokyo's inability or unwillingness to come up with a growth-restoring policy-mix blocks recovery in Asia. Japan's consumers do not spend on imports; its companies, facing weak demand at home and insulated from the pressure of financial markets to exit unprofitable lines of business, dump production abroad, squeezing out developing world competitors. The country's imploding banking system has become a kind of black hole of global finance, sucking in liquidity that ought to be going to poorer countries to fuel growth. Meanwhile, concerns that a sudden stock market reversal in the United States could bring the American expansion to a halt exacerbate worries about Japan. For without a Japan to pick up some of the slack, as it were, we would truly be staring global recession in the face.¹

What particularly frustrates so many non-Japanese is the sense that Japan's policy challenges, while severe, are neither novel nor mysterious. The policy recipe urged on Tokyo is pretty straightforward: fiscal stimulus and monetary expansion; the closing down of sick financial institutions combined with recapitalization of the rest; dismantling of anti-competitive regulations and cartels; reforms of corporate governance and financial markets that force companies to become more profitable or face bankruptcy or takeover. Most observers acknowledge that this policy mix could cause political difficulties for any government that tried to carry it out. At the same time, it appears no more onerous than the restructuring of the American economy in the 1980s or the measures implemented in a number of European countries in order to qualify for membership in the euro bloc. Japan's failure to act seems to boil down to a simple lack of political courage.

The result has been increasingly testy foreign pressure on Japan—much of it, although by no means all, emanating from Washington. It is common knowledge that the Japanese elite often relies on so-called *gaiatsu* (foreign pressure) to provide political cover for unpopular but necessary change. Indeed, the June 1998 meetings in Tokyo of central bankers and deputy finance ministers from eighteen countries are a case in point. Japan found itself totally isolated, pressed on all sides to take the necessary measures to stimulate its economy and heal its banking system. The meetings may have even contributed to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) losses in the next month's elections for the Upper House, and the subsequent replacement of the Hashimoto cabinet with a cabinet under Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi that gave the initial impression of being prepared to do what it took. Certainly, much of the impetus behind the sixty trillion yen bank bailout package, the seventeen trillion yen stimulus package, and the de facto nationalization of several important banks can be traced to these meetings. Yet they were actually arranged by Japan's Ministry of Finance (MOF), leading to accusations in the Japanese media that they had been deliberately staged to produce a loud chorus of foreign pressure on Japan, thereby providing political cover for an about-face by Japan's policy elite.²

¹ Originally presented as a paper at the Centre for Social Theory and Comparative History at UCLA, this article will appear in Robert Brenner (ed.), *The New World Economic Disorder*, Verso forthcoming.

² For example 'Kinkyutsuka Kaigi Seimei, "Shingen" Nihon no Sekinin Tou: Fuan no Rensahadome?' (Declaration from Emergency Currency Meeting; Inquiring

More, however, lurks behind the exasperation with Japan—at least in Washington—than simple resentment at having to play the perennial heavy in an unending political drama that a supposedly mature industrial democracy should no longer need to stage. Indeed, if *gaiatsu* were all it took to elicit the changes Washington wants to see, Larry Summers and Bill Clinton would no doubt be happy to endure the painless—for them—slings and arrows of the Japanese mass media in applying whatever pressure is required. Japan's is not the first government—nor will it be the last—to find foreign pressure a convenient cover for implementing much-needed domestic change: witness the deft ends to which the Italians have employed the Maastricht Treaty obligations, or South Korean President Kim Dae Jung's handling of the IMF requirements imposed on his country. Rather, what seems to produce widespread indignation with Japan—and this indignation is certainly not confined to Washington—is the sense that the Japanese elite does not realize how bad things are, that it is kidding itself. How else to explain the incredulity with which the consumption tax increase of April 1997 was greeted in policy circles—what are these people *doing* raising taxes? Don't they know their economy is flat on its back? Or the increasing shrillness with which well-known economists such as Paul Krugman and Andrew Smithers berate Japan's monetary authorities from the pages of the *Financial Times*?³

Response of Japanese officialdom

Maybe we ought to stop for a moment, therefore, and ask ourselves why Japanese elite officials act as if they believe that Japan's economic plight is not so bad after all. Could it be that they are right; that Japan's economic situation is not so terrible? This seems like a stupid question. The numbers coming out of Tokyo do not lie. Unemployment and bankruptcies are at their post-1940s peaks. GNP shrank in 1998, and the poor third-quarter numbers for 1999 suggest that the high growth rates recorded in the first half of the year were indeed, as many had

on "Epicenter" Japan's Responsibility: Halting the Chain Reaction?) Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 21 June 1998. For an English language account from the same news organization (Japan's leading provider of news on business and finance) see 'Japan Faces Dangerous Isolation', The Nikkei Weekly, 6 July 1998.

³ Paul Krugman 'Personal View: Japan heads for the edge', *Financial Times*, 20 January 1999. See also letters to the same newspaper from Andrew Smithers on 11 November 1998; 15 January 1999; 21 January 1999.

feared, simply the one-off products of huge dollops of public spending rather than signals of any fundamental turnaround. Repeated attempts to jumpstart the Japanese economy with such spending have saddled the country with a government deficit which, as a percentage of GNP, is among the highest in the OECD. The Tokyo Stock Exchange languished for nearly a decade in the grip of one of the most vicious and protracted bear markets of the century; even the recovery that set in early in 1999 is simply taking it back to levels that a few years ago would have been regarded as disastrously low. Real estate prices have fallen more than 60 per cent from their late 1980s peak, with no floor in sight; most of the nation's banks would be insolvent if Japan followed Western accounting standards. And to top it off, we have seen over the past year spikes in both interest rates and the yen. While interest rates have come back down, the forces that led to the spikes are still there; if higher interest rates return or the yen does not soon weaken again, a range of Japanese manufacturers that have been kept alive since the mid nineties on the life support of a weak currency and extremely low interest rates will not survive.

Yet the sense remains that, irrespective of whatever political difficulties may stand in the way of getting the country moving again, Japan's policy elite doesn't really think things are that bad. How could this be? Let's dismiss the notion right away that these people are stupid. Stupidity might serve to explain why they are not doing what Paul Krugman thinks they should do, but it doesn't square with the facts. This is the same policy elite with the same educational and social backgrounds that guided the country from complete devastation to the front rank of the world's industrial powers in less than three decades. In any intelligence test one cared to use, the bureaucrats who staff the Ministry of Finance (MOF), the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), the Bank of Japan (BOJ), and the Economic Planning Agency, together with the upper management ranks of Japan's corporate and banking hierarchies, could hold their own against their counterparts anywhere. Nor is their information faulty; public accounting standards in Japan may leave something to be desired and outside investors certainly fret at their inability to grasp the real financial situation of Japan's banks and corporations, but MOF bureaucrats know exactly what is going on inside the country's financial institutions. For the MOF controls bank funding powers, the opening of branches, the hiring of personnel, and approvals for all financial products. It has engineered every single bank

merger since the 1930s. Japanese bankers do very little without MOF blessing; indeed Japanese banks can be regarded essentially as institutions charged with the execution of MOF policies.⁴

So stupidity or faulty information doesn't help us explain why the Japanese elite acts as if it weren't really sure it faced a crisis. Maybe they privately know how bad things are, but don't want to give the impression of panic. On the surface, this seems like a reasonable hypothesis. If ordinary Japanese households sensed panic in their leaders, if the currency and equity markets saw a policy elite sick with worry, it could only make things worse. Central bankers and financial regulators are expected everywhere to project serene, unflappable confidence; market participants monitor their every twitch for signs of anything else. But this theory falls apart the moment one actually looks at the measures taken by Tokyo's policy elite. Far from giving the impression of attempting to project masterful control, these people act openly as if they don't quite know what to do about problems that they are not convinced are all that urgent. Everyone points fingers, yells at them to do something; since this finger pointing comes from their most important allies and foreign customers—and now from sizeable domestic constituencies, with the capacity to make trouble—they know they must respond. Yet because these problems seem to them fundamentally unreal—or at least beside the point—their policy response lacks coherence. How else to explain such seemingly monumental policy errors as the consumption tax hike of April 1997? The dithering on the bad debt problems, when the dimensions have been clear to everyone since 1992 at the latest? The mule-like obstinacy of the BOJ in refusing to spring the liquidity jaws that seem to have trapped Japan, notwithstanding a domestic and international chorus of economists and policy makers urging the deliberate creation of inflationary expectations? The about-face on government purchases of the bonds being issued to finance the latest bank bailout and stimulus packages? First the MOF says its Trust Fund Bureau won't be buying the new bonds, creating a bond-market panic and driving long-term interest rates up; a few weeks later, it reverses course and says that after all it will mop the excess debt.

⁴ Akio Mikuni writes in 'Japan: The Road to Recovery', *Occasional Papers* #55 (Washington: Group of Thirty 1998), p. 33, 'The MOF has absolute power over Japan's financial institutions thanks to a licensing system that accords licensees the status of little more than subordinate, quasi-public institutions.' Mikuni is the founder and president of Mikuni & Co. Ltd., Japan's only independent, investor-supported bond rating agency.

Taken together, Tokyo's policy moves paint a portrait of befuddlement, uncertainty and serious internal rifts. Banking crises are the financial equivalent of fires; one expects alarm, panic, firemen rushing to the scene; what one doesn't expect are groups of obviously capable firemen standing around debating whether there really is or isn't a fire; if there is, should we use water to put it out, or might we run out of water, so maybe it would be better to try one of these new chemical extinguishers—except the bill for that would be too high? In the meantime, a whole field of bystanders jumps up and down shouting, 'Put out the bloody fire before it burns our houses too!' So the firemen feel they must look busy but don't really do very much.

Viewing the world from Tokyo

Maybe Tokyo's firemen have other things on their minds. Their behaviour may mystify Wall Street and neoclassically trained economists, but Japan's policy elite is not primarily concerned with the factors that usually preoccupy officials in capitalist countries: market confidence, corporate profits, sound banks, stable prices, rising living standards. Other things being equal, it's nice to have these things, but even a cursory look at the history of Japan's policy preoccupations show that other things are more important. Take something as unexceptional as sound banking, for example—seemingly as uncontroversial as motherhood. Sound banking implies prudent lending: lending directed towards solidly profitable borrowers that doesn't finance overcapacity. It implies proper matching between assets and liabilities—in other words, that banks don't use short-term funding to finance long-term lending—and concern with adequate capital cushions. Yet Japanese banks not only paid little attention to such matters; at numerous times during the post-war era they had been actively encouraged by the authorities to make funds available to borrowers who showed no signs of profitability, and to finance overcapacity in a host of industries from automobiles to semi-conductors. They were encouraged to fund long-term loans to these sectors with a mixture of short-term deposits and borrowing in the so-called call money market (Japan's short-term interbank market), with shortfalls made up by the BOJ. When, in the early 1980s, the more financially stable Japanese corporates began to reduce their reliance on bank funding, the authorities looked the other way as the banks began to shovel loans at lesser quality developers and stock market speculators—indeed, the authorities deliberately used the banks to push vast

amounts of credit into an overheated economy, creating in the late 1980s the greatest financial bubble in history. Regulators in most countries urge—or require—their banks to maintain thick capital cushions; back in the mid-1980s, at the so-called BIS negotiations to determine universal bank capital standards, Japan's officials argued that their banks did not need such thick cushions.⁵ Today, these same officials openly connive with the banks to make the cushions look thicker than they actually are.

It is tempting to say that after all Japan's regulators really must be stupid; that they don't know how to administer a modern financial system. Resisting this temptation has proven too much for an army of commentators—some of whom ought to know better—indulging themselves in a veritable orgy of gloating over Japan's current difficulties. But all this triumphalism misses the point; 'sound banking' as defined in the West has never been a policy objective for Japan's elite, any more than 'getting prices right' or 'properly' functioning markets for labour, consumer goods, corporate control and housing.

What, then, have their policy objectives been? Answering this question requires doing something quite unfashionable in today's ahistorical, ageographical, model-fetishizing intellectual world—paying attention to history and to institutions; in this case, Japan's modern history and the bureaucratic power structures that determine policy there.

This is not the place to give Japan's modern history and institutions the treatment they deserve—such an enterprise would require several lifetimes of scholarly work and occupy many thousands of pages. But at the risk of sounding simplistic and reductionist, two points must be emphasized. First, Japan was what might be called a 'catch-up' developer, obsessed with avoiding what had been the fate of most of the non-Western world—colonization. And second, Japan has not experienced what classical Marxists would term a genuine revolution—one class overturning another—since the twelfth century, when a rising class of provincial

⁵ The reference is to the Bank for International Settlements under whose aegis international bank-capital standards were worked out. By March 1993 banks were to have raised the minimum ratio of capital to total assets to 8%, with at least half this capital—so-called Tier One—to consist of equity and retained earnings. A special exception was made for Japanese banks, permitting them to count 45% of the difference between the book value of their equity holdings and the market value of these securities towards their capital requirements.

warriors usurped the prerogatives of a sclerotic centralized aristocracy. (The Meiji Restoration, while hugely important, was, in the last analysis, a struggle between elements of the ruling elite. The feudal character of power relations in the preceding Tokugawa era survived the Restoration essentially intact and indeed continues in some form to this day.)

Let's start with the 'catch-up' developer. 'Catch-up' developers from Bismark's Germany to Park Chung Hee's Korea conceive as the overriding aim of economic policy not living standards and market confidence but the building of the infrastructures of an advanced economy. If a steel industry is a prerequisite for an advanced economy, then policy makers in 'catch-up' developers will do what it takes to ensure their country has a steel industry, even if that means bank loans to unprofitable companies at subsidized rates and flagrant violations of Ricardian free-trade norms. Japan, of course, is the paradigmatic example of a 'catch-up' developer, but there is even more to it than that. Japan's frantic and successful attempts to avoid colonization in the late nineteenth century led to forced development of industries essential to warmaking, a process that accelerated with the invasion of China in 1933 and the subsequent war with the United States. Once the war ended, Japan's economic bureaucracy put the institutions of forced development to work, first in the service of those industries deemed essential to postwar recovery and then to transforming Japan into an industrial power of the first rank.

Japan's economic administrators therefore judge their performance by the criteria of the country's technological prowess and industrial strength. Anyone who has spent any time in Japan or done business with Japanese companies knows that the Japanese are obsessed with the relative standing on global markets of their manufactured products in terms of cost, quality and technological advancement. The profitability or price-earnings ratios of the manufacturers themselves have been, until very recently, almost irrelevant—even meaningless. But on top of this concern with brute industrial strength—natural in a country whose entire modern history essentially constitutes a desperate quest to avoid domination by capricious foreigners whose motives could never be trusted—has been the unique legacy of a political and social order that has not been overturned in its most fundamental aspects for 800 years. For that legacy brings with it the unspoken fear that an overturning might someday happen. Japan did in fact narrowly escape revolution

in the 1870s and again in the late 1940s.⁶ Thus we see the obsession on the part of Japan's governing class with the maintenance of social peace, and a nearly pathological aversion to anything that potentially threatens disorder or a loss of control. Indeed, Japan's 125-year-long drive for technological self-sufficiency and overwhelming industrial might is really part and parcel of the overall efforts to neutralize any threat to the existing order. For ever since the Portuguese appeared in Japanese waters in 1543 with their warships, their guns and their subversive religion, foreigners have represented arguably the biggest single source of such threats. In 1854, a 250-year-old effort to isolate Japan from the world collapsed; and 1945 saw the utter ruin of attempts to use military means in order to force foreigners to deal with the country on its terms. Japan's administrators have thus been left with the single tool of economic policy in trying to control relations with the outside world.

The 1990s—a Japanese perspective

Looked at from the perspectives of industrial might and social order, then, the 1990s presents much more of a mixed picture than do the standard measurements of GNP growth, corporate profits and unemployment rates. To be sure, even when seen through the eyes of Tokyo's policy elite, the picture is not good. Uncertainties once thought resolved have returned with greater force. Demands for change—from both inside and outside Japan—have increased in volume and frequency. After two decades of technological leadership, the country finds itself again a follower in the most widely touted new industries. Formerly reliable policy tools no longer work as they used to. Doubts proliferate about the ability of Japan's administrators to honour all the promises made to disparate groups in the country that have the capacity to make trouble.

At the same time, neither is the picture wholly bleak. In a wide range of manufactured products, Japanese companies can still provide higher quality goods at lower costs than their competitors anywhere. Japanese dominance of key industrial components is so great that it is no more possible these days to run an industrial economy without buying goods from Japan than to do so without buying petroleum. Complex machines—

⁶ See Andrew Gordon's account of the fierce and often violent struggles for 'control of the workplace', to use his term, in the immediate postwar years in *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan*, Cambridge, Mass. 1998.

computers, automobiles, aircraft—cannot be built without Japanese components. For all its financial troubles, the country still commands the world's largest pool of savings and remains the number one net creditor. Indeed, that is why Japan's difficulties so exercise central bankers and finance ministers around the world—if Japan were a poor country with few savings, who would care?

Japan's administrators are clearly under pressure. But at the same time, stretched as they may be, I think they believe that they still command the resources to cope with threats to the existing order, whether those originate from irate foreign countries or increasingly restive domestic groups. Indeed, one could make a convincing case that both internationally and domestically, those threats have receded somewhat in the last three years. A Clinton administration that came to office determined to force change on Japan and overhaul chronic American payments deficits with Tokyo essentially gave up pushing structural reform in the fall of 1998 with the tacit endorsement of the bank bailout and stimulus packages at the expense of the earlier much-hyped reform efforts. And since early 1999, believing that no other alternative to a disastrous Japanese economic collapse exists, Washington has sent several signals that it is once again prepared to accept a further widening of Japan's record trade and current account surpluses. Meanwhile, at home, the most far-reaching attempt in fifty years to impose political control over Japan's governing bureaucracy shows every sign of having run out of steam. The Liberal Democratic Party, which has long traded political cover for the bureaucracy and non-interference in bureaucratic policy making in return for funding to feed its principal power bases—the countryside and the bloated construction sector—has succeeded, at least for the time being, in neutralizing the first significant opposition it had faced since 1960. This is an opposition that had, back in 1993, actually managed to turn the LDP out of office for a few months with a programme of imposing political control over the bureaucracy. But the prospect scared too many influential groups in Japan—the bureaucrats themselves, of course, but also the quality newspapers which fundamentally determine what passes for public opinion in Japan. And the LDP-bureaucracy nexus now appears completely in charge again.

Which doesn't mean they don't face severe challenges—or that they have any unified notion of how to respond to them; but understanding the likely policy responses to these challenges means making the effort to see them through the eyes of Japan's policy elite.

Loss of technological leadership

Reviewing some of the biggest of these challenges, we could start with the loss of technological leadership in such industries as computers and telecommunications. This has had a profoundly demoralizing effect on Japan's administrative elite—more so, I would suspect on the basis of my conversations in Tokyo, than such widely publicized problems as the banking crisis and the exploding fiscal deficits. For by the late 1980s, Japan's policy elite believed they had achieved their century-long goal of an advanced industrial structure wholly under Japanese control—thus forcing the outside world to deal with Japan on its terms, rather than the reverse. But the unexpected resurgence of American industry in the 1990s—particularly the growth of industries clustered around software, the internet and the personal computer—meant that, at their moment of triumph, Japanese companies found they did not after all control the direction of markets in the most important new industries. Indeed, Japanese semi-conductor and computer components companies grumble that they have been reduced to the status of price-takers; that Dell, Compaq and Cisco treat them the way they treat their second- and third-tier subcontractors in Japan. Meanwhile, complaints about the American dominance of the internet are ubiquitous, but the complaints tend to be resigned rather than defiant. For Japan's administrators know full well that the price of taking on the United States head-to-head in internet and software-related industries is the importing of the free-wheeling, entrepreneurial culture of Silicon Valley, complete with maverick young scientists walking out on established university professors, billion-dollar start-ups run by boys in their early twenties, and highly developed venture capital markets immune to bureaucratic interference. Despite periodic attempts to mimic certain aspects of this culture—the Japanese electronics giants that encourage their programmers to wear jeans to work; the attempts by MITI to pass out some \$1.5 billion over the past two years to jumpstart software development⁷ Japan's bureaucrats will not willingly allow anything so threatening to the established order as a Silicon Valley ethos to take root. Instead, look for a continued Japanese drive to ensure that key hardware components are dominated by Japanese manufacturers—they may not be able to dictate the pace of development, as they once thought they could, but the world will still have to do business with them. Look for continued

⁷ MITI's software promotion activities can be viewed at the website: www.ipa.go.jp

Japanese leadership in so-called embedded software: the software incorporated into the likes of elevators and automobiles.

Banking crisis and 'credit rights'

A second challenge, of course, is that banking crisis which so exercises policy makers and observers everywhere. But Japan's administrators, even though they may use the word, do not see it as a banking crisis in the way Western regulators would—if they did, they would long ago have closed down shaky banks, recapitalized the healthier ones and foreclosed on bad debt. Instead, Tokyo's mandarins view the problem in terms of what Karel van Wolferen has very usefully termed 'credit rights'.⁸ In a capitalist society, there is no such thing as a right to credit held by any entity other than perhaps the government itself through its powers to tax and print money. No other public sector institution, private company or individual—even the strongest and richest—enjoys any automatic right to credit. But in Japan, an elaborate, although informal—that is, not codified—system of credit rights is administered by powerful official and unofficial bureaucracies. Credit is thus allocated through criteria that are fundamentally bureaucratic in nature rather than market driven—an institution or person that meets certain criteria receives a right to credit; the quid pro quo for access to credit being support for, or at least acquiescence in, bureaucratic policy goals. Once this notion is understood, then such key elements of Japan's economic structure as main banks, *keiretsu* or corporate clusters, the convoy system for the nation's banks (*gososendan*), and lifetime employment fall into place. Most companies have 'main banks' that are expected to support corporate activities irrespective of profitability. The MOF long administered a so-called convoy system that guaranteed the viability of all the banks. Corporate clusters anchored by cross-shareholdings allow each member unlimited access to group resources while imposing, on the other side of the coin, unlimited obligations to other group members. Companies are expected to provide for the life-long livelihood of core employees (*seisha-in*).

The banking crisis can best be understood as the outward manifestation of the inability of Japan's administrators to meet all the demands of those with credit rights. The reasons why this crisis developed in the 1990s—after several decades in which no such problems existed—

⁸ Unpublished paper.

are many and complex, but they boil down to an inability to generate the constant increases in nominal GNP that characterized the Japanese economy from the 1950s through to the late 1980s. Akio Mikuni has suggested that this in turn is rooted in Japan's emergence as a net creditor nation, leading to secular upward pressure on the yen and a deflationary bias in the economy.⁹ A net creditor nation is almost surely a mature economy; mature economies do not as a rule grow quickly. At the same time, claims on foreign countries generate deflationary pressures because those claims can be and are exercised through purchases of cheaper foreign goods and assets. This has been particularly obvious in the Japanese case with land. Land prices underpinned the structure of asset values to such an extent that many Japanese economists describe the Japanese system as *tochi hon-i-sei*, or land-value economy. (Loans of more than one year were typically, for example, secured by land; most Japanese banks paid little attention to corporate cash flow, instead looking at the value of corporate land holdings.)¹⁰ Many of Japan's growing claims on foreign countries have been exercised in such a way as to put tremendous deflationary pressures on Japanese real estate prices, which had reached such stratospheric levels in the late 1980s that the market value of the Imperial Palace Grounds was said to be greater than that of the whole of Canada.

Tokyo's overriding concern in this decade has been to get the country moving without a large-scale revoking of credit rights. Building a floor under the stock market with public funds in the summer of 1992, securing the help of the US Treasury to reverse a soaring yen in the summer of 1995, the extremely low interest rate regime and periodic floods of public works spending, the resolution of the housing loan crisis, the consumption tax hike and the series of MOF-administered bank mergers all make sense in this light.¹¹

⁹ Mikuni, *op. cit.* See particularly pages 8–10.

¹⁰ For the critical role that real estate played in the 'bubble economy' of the late 1980s, see R. Taggart Murphy, *The Weight of the Yen*, New York 1996, pp. 210–4.

¹¹ The consumption tax hike, implemented against the advice of the US Treasury and many independent economists, appears to have had two purposes: first, to increase the revenues available to the Japanese government, thereby boosting the discretionary funds available to honour credit rights; and second, to maintain control over the structure of interest rates. In any economy, the rate the government itself pays for funds forms the floor interest rate. But as the Japanese government's financing needs increase, the ability to borrow in defiance of market forces comes under question. The Japanese government has historically met its borrowing

By the fall of 1997, however, with the collapse of three major financial institutions and overall growth turning sharply negative, it had become evident not only that efforts to revive the economy were going nowhere but that it was going to be impossible to honour all credit rights. What we have seen since then is a kind of triage, with credit rights being revoked to politically weak sectors—small independent businesses for example, some of the lesser corporate clusters, also-ran manufacturers—not to mention much of the financial sector where the MOF has, since the late 1980s, openly forced ‘shotgun’ mergers (that of the Mitsui and Taiyo Kobe banks to form the Sakura Bank a harbinger of the mega-mergers of the past year), permitted a number of highly visible institutions to fail (Yamaichi Securities, for example, and the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank), and effectively nationalized the Long-Term Credit Bank of Japan and the Nippon Credit Bank. Highly visible tie-ups with foreigners, on the lines of the stake Renault has taken in Nissan, and the success in the last two years by foreign financial institutions in areas heretofore closed to them should not, however, be misinterpreted. This ongoing credit triage is not being decided by market forces free of bureaucratic interference. No sign exists that Japan’s administrators really want to see genuine markets in credit and corporate control take root. Even if they were so inclined, it would take at least a decade to build the institutional infrastructure of a modern capitalist economy: independent ratings agencies, a sizeable accounting profession (in an economy two and a half times as large as Britain’s, Japan has about one eighth the number of chartered accountants), enough lawyers, judges and courts to handle the reso-

needs by ‘force-feeding’ government bonds (so-called JGBs) to syndicates of banks and securities firms that had no choice but to participate, and through purchases by the MOF’s trust fund bureau, funded by the assets of the postal savings system. With the advent of the banking crisis and the desperate need to restore profitability to the banks, continued forced-feeding of unprofitable JGBs has become less tenable. Meanwhile, the assets of the postal savings system are increasingly stretched. But having to finance the Japanese government’s debt through real bond markets responding to market forces would inevitably produce a sharp hike in interest rates, as was demonstrated late in 1998 when the trust fund bureau announced it would cut back its JGB purchases. The announcement was rescinded in the wake of a sharp rise in both the yen and interest rates, but it remains inevitable in the absence of debt monetization (see discussion below) if Japan’s fiscal borrowing requirements continue to snowball. MOF officials appear to have hoped a hike in the consumption tax would forestall such a snowballing, but they miscalculated. The depressing effects on the economy more than outweighed the additional tax revenues.

lution of economic disputes. But the situation does create significant opportunities for foreigners in a number of industries, from pharmaceuticals to automobiles, where foreign participation is seen as preferable to technological backwardness, or widespread layoffs and plant closings. And there is no question but that Japan's authorities have decided that Japan's bankers and brokers simply do not possess the expertise necessary to run highly competitive modern financial institutions. In a pattern that goes back to the early Meiji period, foreigners are being temporarily welcomed in this sector and given the opportunity to make significant money until such time as the Japanese learn what they need to know.

While some of the expertise the foreigners are introducing is purely technical in nature—to an extraordinary degree, for example, cash is still used in Japan to settle obligations, cheques are almost unheard of, and even payments done via ATMs are encrusted with high and antiquated fees;¹² technology introduced by foreigners will surely shake up the payment and settlement systems—the foreigners will also bring with them market forces that have the potential to destabilize the Japanese system and threaten bureaucratic control over credit allocation. Indeed, this is already happening to some degree—Japanese corporations have been tapping international capital markets for twenty years now and money has been leaking out of the Japanese system for most of this decade as investors seek higher returns offshore. It is a mistake to conclude, however, that simply because the administrators of the Japanese system are, under duress, permitting the introduction of market forces into areas where they were previously suppressed, that they have abandoned their long-held conviction that economic outcomes ought to be determined by a highly trained bureaucratic elite rather than the free play of market forces. It is, of course, conceivable that the foreign financial institutions represent the thin edge of a wedge that will finally undermine bureaucratic control. But aside from the difficulty referred to above in creating the infrastructure of a capitalist economy out of whole cloth, the bureaucracy continues to have formidable powers at its command in forestalling outcomes that it views as undesirable. In particular, tax policy—both the policies themselves and the aggressive use of audits—

¹² To pay your rent in Japan, for example, you have two choices—you can take the cash to your landlord's bank, fill out a form, and wait a few minutes while the transaction is processed. Or you can pay your bank to do it—usual cost is about 400 yen (\$3.30), irrespective of the amount involved. You can use an ATM, but it will still cost you.

discourages many Japanese from investing overseas. Institutions which are insufficiently accommodating to bureaucratic wishes can be made the subject of onerous investigations, manufactured 'scandals', and the institutional equivalent of show trials.¹³

Unpredictable outside world

A third challenge lies in the growing unpredictability of events outside Japan that impinge on the country's prosperity. Since 1952, the year that marked the end of the American Occupation, Japan's principal tool in coping with the outside world has been a sustained, herculean effort to ensure that the United States provided a protective umbrella for Japan—or, really, two umbrellas: firstly, a military/security umbrella that made it unnecessary for Japan to have independent foreign policies and security arrangements. If the United States had not managed for Tokyo those functions by which a state is most easily identified—conducting foreign relations and providing for security—Japan would have been forced to hold some sort of internal debate that carried the potential for terrible domestic disruption in a country that has still not even begun to examine the institutional reasons for the disaster of the Second World War. And secondly, the United States provided an economic umbrella that, among other things, ensured access to world markets for Japanese goods at a competitive—that is to say, undervalued—exchange rate. For the unrestricted ability to dispose of excess production on world markets forms an absolutely essential safety valve in an economic system where investment is unconstrained by the need to compete for credit.

Broadly speaking, Japan has employed two sets of tactics in ensuring that the United States maintained these umbrellas. The first set, used until the early 1980s, involved threats that Japan would go socialist or communist unless the United States cooperated in this or that area or trade problem. Such threats have been empty since 1960 at the latest,

¹³ The plethora of rules and regulations that ostensibly govern economic life are so numerous and impractical that it is hardly possible to do business without violating one or more of them. When the bureaucracy wishes to make an example of someone or some institution, the offending party is made the target of an ostentatious investigation for following what has heretofore been accepted practice. Karel van Wolferen has written extensively about the use of 'scandals' in the Japanese system to maintain order. See 'Sukyandaru ni yotte Nihon Kenryoku Kikou wa Ikinobiru' (The Structure of Japanese Power depends on Scandals), *Chuo Koron*, October 1991, pp. 186–94.

but to a Washington trapped by its own ideological misconceptions and with inadequate resources devoted to Japan,¹⁴ the notion that leftists stood dangerously close to the levers of power in Tokyo retained some credibility well into the 1980s.

The second set of tactics that have today almost entirely supplanted the first set (which has now dwindled to the depiction of sentiment on Okinawa vis-à-vis the location of American bases there) stem from the growing financial leverage Japan has accumulated over the United States since the early 1980s. At the time, an incoming Reagan administration enacted a set of policies guaranteeing that the US national debt would explode and that the United States would become the world's leading net debtor nation. Japan emerged both as principal foreign holder of claims on the US government and as the indispensable financier of America's current account deficit—directly, through its heavy purchases since the early 1980s of US government debt, and indirectly, through the country's willingness to denominate the bulk of its claims on the outside world in dollars rather than yen. Japan has used the resulting leverage, particularly in this decade, to blunt American trade offensives (the withdrawal of American threats to impose sanctions on Japan's automakers in June 1995—sanctions that had across-the-board political support in the United States—was, for example, due solely to fears over disruptions in the bond and currency markets) and to secure essential American cooperation in reducing the value of the yen whenever it threatened to impose an intolerable burden on Japan's exporters.

But while these tactics have been successful—seen most recently in the tacit American acquiescence early in 1999 in yet another widening of the Japanese trade surplus—they carry increasingly unpredictable side effects. Case in point: the August 1995 joint interventions by the Japanese and American authorities to halt a soaring yen/dollar rate. In the weeks before that intervention, it took only 80 yen to buy a dollar. That kind of rate, had it continued for a year or more, would surely have forced a restructuring on Japan—Japanese exporters were not even covering variable costs. But Japanese officials made an extremely plausible case to then US Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin that, if left alone, that rate would end Japan's ability to prop up the

¹⁴ One former top official of the Office of the US Trade Representative told me he couldn't even get the funds for subscriptions to leading Japanese newspapers.

US current account deficit.¹⁵ That would finally have pulled the curtain down on the perennial American trade and current account deficits, but at the cost of plunging the US into recession. For the current account plugs the difference between what a country spends and what it produces. In the American economy of the 1990s, high capacity utilization rates preclude any rapid increase in output. Thus the only way in which the current account deficit can fall is through a reduction in spending; to put it in other terms, through a recession. To a politically weakened administration reeling from the disaster of the 1994 Congressional elections and facing a presidential election eighteen months off, the prospect of a recession was far more frightening than that of a widening trade deficit. And when the Japanese offered their help in forestalling such a recession—albeit at the cost of perpetuating the bilateral trade imbalance—the administration's senior economic policy officer took it.

But as both Rubin and the Japanese were to discover, it is no longer a bi-polar world. The yen did indeed drop, pulling Japan back for a while from the precipice. At the same time, the Bank of Japan set about backing up the foreign exchange goals with extremely low interest rates.¹⁶ But as Keynes once noted, in an economy where banks won't lend and people won't spend, this is no more effective than pushing on a wet noodle. Instead of reviving the domestic economy, the low interest rates attracted the hedge funds, giving rise to the so-called yen carry trade¹⁷ and funding the offshore lending of the Japanese and European banks who made it available to eager borrowers in other Asian countries where

¹⁵ See John Judis's account of the negotiations between Rubin and the Japanese officials in the *New Republic*, 9 December 1996.

¹⁶ The official discount rate, already an extraordinarily low 1.75%, had been cut in April 1995 to 1.0%. In September of that year, it was cut again to 0.5%.

¹⁷ A bit of financial jargon that refers to borrowing yen funds in Tokyo at extremely low interest rates, exchanging the proceeds for a higher interest currency (usually dollars), and on-lending in that currency. Profits come from capturing the difference between the yen and other currency interest rates, but are at risk if the yen suddenly strengthens. This is indeed what happened in October 1998, following the Russian debt moratorium. The yen soared from 135 to 115 to the dollar as many financial institutions suddenly had to scramble to meet their yen obligations when their lenders, knowing the borrowers' exposure to Russia and fearing their ability to meet their obligations, began calling in their financing facilities. The precipitous rise in the yen wiped out most of the profits in the yen carry trade, spread the damage from the Russian moratorium far beyond those institutions exposed to Russia and helped to precipitate the near-collapse of leading hedge funds such as Long-Term Capital Management.

it financed unsustainable bubbles in property and other markets. The bubbles all burst, bringing on the worst global economic crisis since the 1930s, and crippling what had become Japan's most important export market. For not only had the competitiveness of neighbouring Asian countries been hit hard by the weakening of the yen—directly affecting their ability to earn foreign exchange through exports and thus their ability to purchase Japanese goods—but the financial crisis in these countries devastated hundreds of billions of dollars worth of investments which had been directly or indirectly funded via the Japanese banking system, thus delivering yet another blow to a set of institutions already reeling from domestic difficulties.

Now Japan must contend with the arrival of a new uncertainty: a euro that already shows signs of complicating efforts to maintain a price advantage for Japanese goods on world markets. The unanticipated current weakness of the euro helped set off the latest surge of yen strength that now threatens to destroy whatever chance of recovery Japan has. Any future surge in the value of the euro is much more likely to reflect an easing dollar than an easing yen. And a European Central Bank has much less reason to help a beleaguered Tokyo reduce upward pressure on the yen than does a US Treasury acutely sensitive to Japan's key role in sustaining the swollen American current account deficit.

Domestic discontent

Amidst the challenges from abroad, Japan's policy elite confronts what is probably an even bigger challenge at home—coping with domestic discontent. In an economy no longer growing, where credit triage is forcing the administrators to revoke many of the indiscriminate promises made to almost any domestic group with the capacity to cause trouble, political and economic life in Japan today is characterized by increasing rancour. In the absence of an infrastructure of market mechanisms and legal institutions sufficient to perform ordering functions, ever more open intimidation and arbitrary exercises of power determine who survives and who doesn't. The political gridlock reported overseas that delayed a bank bailout package until October 1998 only forms the surface of a tremendous power struggle in Japan over the disposition of the bad debt. Almost every important power group in the country is involved, one way or another, in the struggle and, of course, that very visibly includes organized crime, which has made an orderly process of foreclosure impossible.

So far, this struggle does not threaten the essence of the Japanese system; a system that survived the Second World War and the American Occupation essentially intact can cope with a decade of no growth and a trillion dollars in bad debts. But the struggle does have far-reaching economic implications, and has itself now become a cause of the country's problems, as well as a result. This is most obvious in the behaviour of Japanese households, which have had their confidence shattered in a range of institutions—lifetime employment, the Ministry of Finance, the banking system, the very foundations of postwar growth and prosperity. This collapse in confidence has not coalesced into anything resembling a serious political threat to the existing order—indeed, as noted above, the attempt by some of Japan's more astute politicians to impose political control over the bureaucracy appears for the time being to have collapsed. But it has fostered a climate of risk-averse malaise that takes concrete financial form, among other ways, in the rapidly expanding withdrawals of household funds from the banking system and the growth of cash in circulation, now running greater than five times that in the United States on a per capita basis.¹⁸ The pressure from abroad to monetize Japan's fiscal deficits¹⁹ in the hopes of creating inflation—even assuming technically it could be done in a country where banks are not lending and people are not spending—would remove the last remaining prop of consumer confidence: the purchasing power of household savings.

Interdependence and the policy conundrum

The success or failure of Japan's policy responses to these challenges forms one of the four great uncertainties looming over the global economy, whose fate in turn is wrapped up in how these challenges are met. For the other three great uncertainties—recovery in the developing world, the success of the euro, and the continuation of the American expansion—are very much connected to what happens in Japan. This is

¹⁸ As estimated by Mikuni & Co.

¹⁹ 'Monetization' is a technical term referring to creation of additional money by central bankers in amounts equivalent to additional debt issued by governments. In most cases, inflation results, which is why central bankers usually oppose the practice. Some debate exists as to whether Japan actually could monetize additional debt. The Bank of Japan can of course create additional yen funds, but it may encounter obstacles to pushing those funds out into the economy because banks are loath to lend, businesses to borrow, and consumers to spend.

not simply because the global economy badly needs the additional purchasing power that a recovering Japan could provide. While true, this point is overshadowed by something even more important: the American economic expansion depends upon Japan's ability and willingness to prop up the dollar and finance American current account deficits.

Which saddles Tokyo and Washington with an exquisite policy conundrum—a world economic engine dangerously dependent on American household consumption badly needs a revitalized Japanese economy to help fuel a broad global recovery. But the very process of overhauling the Japanese economy threatens American consumer spending.

To grasp this, recall that more American household assets today are tied up in mutual funds than in bank deposits. As households watch their net wealth grow, thanks to the booming stock market, they save less and less (another way of saying they spend more and more). Indeed, the household savings rate in the United States today is actually negative. But in an economy operating at full capacity, shrinking the current account deficit can only be done by reducing spending, thereby shutting down the last remaining engine keeping the global economic plane aloft. And the structural overhaul widely prescribed to get the Japanese economy moving and thus rev up another engine carries precisely that risk.

Thus the policy conundrum. Japan's sick banks appear to be at the heart of the country's problems but they are, in fact, symptoms of a deeper structural crisis. Decades of investment without regard for profitability or return have saddled Japan with horrendous overcapacity, which takes financial shape as bad loans on the books of the nation's banks. Doing something about this overcapacity means job losses and bankruptcies. It means acknowledging that the deposits that financed most of this capacity via the banking system are not worth anything like what people think they are. But tell Japan's households, whose savings overwhelmingly take the form of deposits with the bank or the post office, that those deposits may not be safe; tell them that their companies may close and they may lose their jobs, and you have a full-scale depression on your hands as banks collapse and people stop spending.

Indeed, this has been happening in slow motion. Ordinary Japanese are not stupid. They know that many, even most, banks are being kept from insolvency only by emergency transfusions; that the business environ-

ment is awful. They react like sensible people would anywhere—cutting back all but essential spending and pulling money out of tottering banks. Worsen this palpable unease in Japan by doing what the champions of structural reform have long been advocating—close down the shaky banks; put unprofitable companies out of business while streamlining the rest—and you risk turning a recession into a full-fledged depression. Who will then finance the US current account deficit?

The Japanese do not, of course, prop up this deficit all by themselves. Developing countries trying to export their way out of their difficulties and Europeans anxious not to miss out on the American equity boom are also helping to finance the American deficit. But financing from these other sources comes and goes, while the Japanese surplus boasts roughly the same life-span as that which it has long financed—the American deficit. Just as the latter has grown steadily through times of inflation, bear markets, recession, runaway Federal deficits, recovery, bull markets, budget surpluses and today's boom times, so the former has similarly expanded through the so-called miracle economy years, the oil shocks, the early 1980s industrial superpower years the late 1980s bubble, and the stagnation, recession, financial crises and deflation of the 1990s.

Since the sum of the world's deficits and surpluses have to balance, any country that runs a current account surplus is, by definition, in directly supporting the US deficit. But Japan's current account surpluses have directly supported and financed the countervailing American deficits over the past two decades because of a historical anomaly: while Japan is the world's leading net creditor nation, its claims on the outside world have been denominated not in its own currency but largely in the currency of the world's leading debtor nation. Japan's exporters typically bill their overseas customers in dollars rather than yen. Equally importantly, these businesses have generally refrained from repatriating their dollar export earnings, leaving the dollars on deposit with Japanese banks where they ultimately find their way into the US banking system. Akio Mikuni and I will argue in a forthcoming book that Japan's monetary authorities have long run what amounts to a currency board, matching the dollar earnings of Japanese companies with yen credit creation, thereby permitting Japanese businesses to meet their yen expenses without repatriating their dollar earnings. Indeed, Japanese banks have traditionally supplemented the dollar deposits of Japanese businesses by raising additional funds in offshore dollar markets. Collectively, these

practices by Japan's exporters and banks, backed up by what amounts to yen monetization of the dollar earnings of Japanese companies, have been essential to maintaining a far stronger dollar (or, in other words, a far weaker yen) than that which Japan's endless trade and current account surpluses would otherwise seem to dictate. Indeed, this has been the implicit aim of the policies: to forestall a surge in the yen/dollar rate that would impose killingly high cost pressures on Japanese businesses and open the floodgates to waves of cartel-busting imports.

Problems of the yen

But Japan's economic troubles have seriously endangered these dollar-support mechanisms. The increasing publicity given to Japan's banking troubles and the lowering of bank ratings by the international ratings agencies have made it difficult or impossible for Japan's banks overseas to raise dollar funds from non-Japanese sources. As a result, while Japan's net creditor position continues to grow, its gross creditor position has been shrinking, weakening a major prop of dollar strength. And even more importantly, the perilous state of the Japanese banking system threatens the means that the Japanese monetary authorities have always relied upon to release credit into the economy.²⁰

So far, these pressures have been contained, although it should be noted that the yen now shows signs of another ruinous surge along the lines of the one that nearly destroyed the economy in the spring of 1995, when it took only 79 yen to buy a dollar. But if Japan were to experience the fabled 'hard landing' that many believe is the inevitable price of meaningful structural reform, it is difficult to see how these dollar-support mechanisms could survive. In particular, a sudden collapse of confidence in the entire Japanese banking system—something that has been a real threat now since the fall of 1997, when the Hokkaido Takushoku Bank imploded before the authorities were able to halt the crash—would make it impossible for the BOJ to continue monetizing Japan's dollar earnings. Japanese companies would be forced to repatriate dollars and

²⁰ Rather than open-market operations, where the Federal Reserve buys and sells US government securities in order to control the money supply, Japan's monetary authorities have typically relied upon bank credit creation and so-called 'administrative guidance'. See Yoshio Suzuki, *The Japanese Financial System*, Oxford 1989, particularly pp. 317–26. The author was the director of the Institute for Monetary and Economic Studies at the Bank of Japan.

exchange them for yen, driving the dollar sharply down. As the dollar fell, a US bond market crash would surely follow, as dollar interest rates rose sharply to attract investors worldwide into dollar instruments. That crash would mark the end of the American expansion.

Faced with this nasty prospect, both Washington and reform advocates in Japan seem to have concluded that pumping up the Japanese economy with the steroids of massive spending was preferable to risky root-and-branch reform. The key moment appears to have been the decision in June 1998 by the then US Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin, to intervene in the foreign exchange markets to help prop up the sagging yen that had become the most concrete manifestation of Japan's alarming condition.²¹ On the eve of the intervention, President Clinton spoke to the then Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto in a widely publicized telephone call and extracted a promise from him that Japan would inject public money into the banking system and pump up the economy. The most convincing explanation for at least the timing of these moves was Clinton's imminent visit to China and the need to avoid a devastating devaluation of the Chinese currency on the eve of the summit. Beijing had made it clear in all kinds of ways that unless something was done to halt the rapid fall of the yen and get Japan growing again, China could not be held to its promise not to devalue.

The intervention was only the first sign of the policy shift. At the hastily called Tokyo meetings of deputy finance ministers and central bankers from eighteen countries on 20 June 1998, mentioned above, Japan

²¹ Alert readers may discern a seeming contradiction here—why intervene to support a sagging yen if the long-term danger is a soaring yen which destroys the global viability of the dollar and the ability of the United States to finance current account deficits? By the summer of 1998, pessimism about Japan had become so widespread that investors worldwide were unwilling to hold any yen instruments, creating a vicious circle as expectations of further yen weakening took hold. This directly threatened the Tokyo stock market—increasingly dependent on foreign portfolio investors—and thus the capital ratios of Japan's banks. Had the situation continued, most of Japan's banks would have been forced into open bankruptcy, destroying the dollar-support mechanism discussed above. At that point, a whipsaw would probably have occurred, along the lines of the smaller one that did occur in October 1998 (see note 16), only instead of taking the yen from 135 to 115 in four days (something that astonished market participants at the time), the whipsaw could have seen the yen go from 180 or 190 to 60 or 70, finally breaking the Japanese system and global prosperity along with it.

found itself completely isolated, subject to demands on all sides that it do whatever it took to restore growth. The Obuchi cabinet finally succeeded three months later in pushing massive stimulus and bank bailout packages through the Diet.

But the latest numbers suggest that all this spending has delivered only one more still-born recovery, something we have seen repeatedly since 1992. The rationale behind the attempts to jumpstart the economy seems, admittedly, clear enough: a revival of confidence by both domestic consumers and foreign investors such that aggregate demand recovers to the point where it becomes self-sustaining. With demand up, businesses begin investing. Banks start lending again and as the overall economy picks up, the shrinking of the huge debt overhang from the banking crisis can get underway. And a rising economy brings with it rising tax revenues and thus the wherewithal to repay the money borrowed to spark the recovery. Meanwhile, investors, both domestic and foreign, seeing a self-sustaining recovery, start pouring money into the Tokyo stock market, reinforcing the virtuous cycle.

This scenario or something close to it is clearly what Japanese officialdom has banked on, and they underlined their policy efforts with an extraordinary public relations campaign designed to convince sceptics both in and outside Japan that the corner had finally been turned. Whatever the policy results, the PR campaign at least worked brilliantly: the Tokyo stock market rose substantially—indeed, for dollar-based investors, the combined effects of a rising yen and rising stock prices made Tokyo the most profitable of the world's major equity markets in 1999. The foreign press saluted the supposed restructuring of the Japanese economy, while many influential economists at major international banks advised their clients not to miss out on the Japanese turnaround.²²

But while the final verdict on the latest recovery efforts is not yet in, the most recent evidence—not simply the third quarter GNP numbers

²² Deutsche Bank's well-known economist Dr Kenneth Courtis was quoted in 'Sunrise for Asia's Economy', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1999, saying that if the current moves by the Bank of Japan work out, 'you will see a flood of money come into the stock market, and the economy and financial system will begin to emerge from the worst crisis of a major economy since the 1930s.' Just six months earlier in a newsletter he had written of the 'critical decisions now so desperately urgent to reverse course before the country careens into a massive financial iceberg.' *Deutsche Morgan Grenfell Global Strategy Research Asia*, 25 June 1998.

but the fact that profits for the corporate sector as a whole have, for the first time in fifty years, turned negative—suggests that the nay-sayers may have the last word. At the time of all the hype about Japan's turnaround, Ron Bevacqua, then Senior Economist for Merrill Lynch in Tokyo, warned in a newsletter of the risk that the cyclical rebound would be short-lived. Akio Mikuni maintained that 'a sustainable recovery is not possible for Japan until excess capacity is eliminated. Far from addressing the problem, the bank bailout package permitted it to continue.' Mikuni's fears that the bailout money would be used by banks to prop up borrowers who ought to be allowed to fail, have turned out to be valid.

Bluster and cooperation

Indeed, on closer examination, even the government's commitment to reflation was less than total. The MOF announcement in late 1998 that its Trust Fund Bureau, a long-standing parking place for excess government debt, would actually reduce bond purchases, produced both a stronger yen and a sharp rise in longer term interest rates as the bond market gagged on all the new debt—the opposite of what a reflationary government would presumably want. While the MOF soon reversed its decision, and both interest rates and the currency temporarily came partway back down, the underlying forces that drove the MOF's earlier announcement did not go away. As of this writing, the yen is again threatening to break the 100-yen barrier. Meanwhile, demands on the Postal Savings System—the primary source of funding not only for the Trust Fund Bureau's bond purchases but a myriad of other MOF-decreed purposes (including purchases of the bad debt of many banks)—may spiral out of control. Exacerbating these concerns are fears that in 2000 and 2001 the Post Office may see a net outflow of deposits as a wave of ten-year fixed deposits, taken down in 1990 and 1991 during a temporary spike in interest rates, mature and are not renewed. The Bank of Japan has made it clear it has no intention of monetizing the new debt to accommodate the extra spending. The strains on the Postal Savings System and the stance of the BOJ led Bevacqua to warn that at some point 'rising interest rates are likely to choke the economy.'

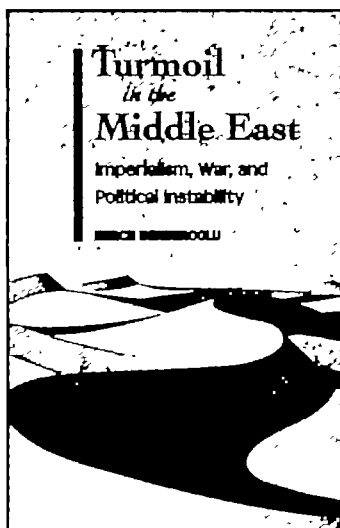
Even if Japan's authorities manage to take all the right macroeconomic steps, these do not address the underlying microeconomic, structural reasons that many fear will block a sustainable return by Japan to the bril-

liant economic performance for which the country was, until recently, so celebrated. For the political forces allied against reform are very great, including as they do not only many of Japan's frightened households but almost every entrenched domestic power group. One major exception is Japan's most successful companies—Toyota, Honda, Sony, Matsushita, Kyocera, Canon, Ito-Yokado and the like. Since Japan's prosperity is ultimately in the hands of companies like these, it is conceivable that if the domestic impasse seriously endangers their ability to compete on world markets, they could force far-reaching reforms. Such reforms could include, for example, the curbing of cartel-like arrangements by which strong companies have traditionally borne the burden of supporting their weaker competitors, suppliers and other corporate cluster members. Or, to translate into the language of finance, the liabilities of such companies might finally become explicit and understandable to outside investors. Indeed, unofficial bureaucracies such as the *Keidanren* which have always played a critical order-keeping role in the Japanese system have increasingly come under the control of top performers such as Toyota and Kyocera rather than old-line establishment firms such as Nippon Steel, suggesting that a powershift may be occurring. But if it is, it is probably more in the nature of a co-opting than a herald of fundamental change. For predicting that Japan's 'champion' companies will cede control of key management prerogatives to outside investors, or place profitability and the concerns of shareholders over those of the ministries, banks and the other members of corporate clusters and industrial associations into which they are bound by all-encompassing bureaucratic webs, is tantamount to predicting upheaval on the scale of the Meiji Restoration. It could happen, and if Japan's very survival were at stake, it probably would. But current circumstances, bad as they may be, do not yet begin to threaten such.

And of course whatever lip service the United States pays to reform, anything that endangers Japanese support for the dollar and the financing of the American current account deficit will ultimately be resisted by any President or Treasury Secretary who cares about keeping his job. Since the structural reform which Washington has been preaching at Japan for a generation now carries precisely that risk, future administrations are almost certain to continue the pattern set by the Clinton White House—empty bluster about the need for change; quiet cooperation in maintaining the existing order.

Thus, some form of 'muddle through' is, if not the most likely outcome, certainly the most likely strategy to be followed by Japan's policy elite—as it was through the 1990s. To be sure, loud and persistent demands for 'change' will produce at least the appearance of a response. As stresses intensify, the weaker and less organized segments of Japanese society will be sacrificed to protect the central core—in much the same way that survivors of the Kobe earthquake affiliated with major companies soon found themselves rehoused while small shopkeepers and the like were essentially left to fend for themselves. In trying to predict the future, there is little we can say with any certainty, but we can be confident that the very last thing to 'change' will be the essence of the Japanese system—opaque, bureaucratic decision-making and prerogatives without accountability to voters, journalists, outside shareholders, CPAs, politicians or courts.

The problem with 'muddle through', however, is that it makes insufficient allowance for system-threatening shocks brought on by the law of unintended consequences in action. The damage inflicted by the developing world crisis of 1998 on the Japanese economy and on the central prop of the economic relationship between the United States and Japan—the intertwining of the Japanese current account surplus and the American deficit—exceeded what anyone had dreamed possible before the fact, and while for the time being the damage appears to have been contained, it was a very near thing. And of course the next such shock—and we have no way of knowing where it will come from or what it will be—could easily overwhelm the combined efforts of Tokyo and Washington to cope. Meanwhile, 'unsustainable' situations—particularly the rot at the core of Japanese finance, but also endless American external deficits, Japanese surpluses, and currency rates that bear no relation to trade and investment flows—have been 'sustained' for so long that many have been lulled into thinking they can continue forever. A rude awakening may be in store. Finally, 'muddle through' depends on the ability of powerholders in Washington and Tokyo to strike exaggerated poses of concern over 'reform', 'market opening' and the construction of 'level playing fields', while at the same time doing everything necessary to maintain an order which is neither open, nor level, nor reformed, but which is absolutely essential to existing power alignments and to the political and financial fortunes of ruling elites in both places.



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FRANCO MORETTI

CONJECTURES ON WORLD LITERATURE

My mission: to say it more simply than I understand it.
Schönberg, *Moses and Aaron*

“NOWADAYS, NATIONAL LITERATURE doesn’t mean much: the age of world literature is beginning, and everybody should contribute to hasten its advent.’ This was Goethe, of course, talking to Eckermann in 1827; and these are Marx and Engels, twenty years later, in 1848: ‘National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the many national and local literatures, a world literature arises.’ *Weltliteratur*: this is what Goethe and Marx have in mind. Not ‘comparative’, but world literature: the Chinese novel that Goethe was reading at the time of that exchange, or the bourgeoisie of the *Manifesto*, which has ‘given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country’. Well, let me put it very simply: comparative literature has not lived up to these beginnings. It’s been a much more modest intellectual enterprise, fundamentally limited to Western Europe, and mostly revolving around the river Rhine (German philologists working on French literature). Not much more.

This is my own intellectual formation, and scientific work always has limits. But limits change, and I think it’s time we returned to that old ambition of *Weltliteratur*: after all, the literature around us is now unmistakably a planetary system. The question is not really *what* we should

do—the question is *how*. What does it mean, studying world literature? How do we do it? I work on West European narrative between 1790 and 1930, and already feel like a charlatan outside of Britain or France. World literature?

Many people have read more and better than I have, of course, but still, we are talking of hundreds of languages and literatures here. Reading ‘more’ seems hardly to be the solution. Especially because we’ve just started rediscovering what Margaret Cohen calls the ‘great unread’. ‘I work on West European narrative, etc. . . .’ Not really, I work on its canonical fraction, which is not even one per cent of published literature. And again, some people have read more, but the point is that there are thirty thousand nineteenth-century British novels out there, forty, fifty, sixty thousand—no one really knows, no one has read them, no one ever will. And then there are French novels, Chinese, Argentinian, American . . . Reading ‘more’ is always a good thing, but not the solution.¹

Perhaps it’s too much, tackling the world and the unread at the same time. But I actually think that it’s our greatest chance, because the sheer enormity of the task makes it clear that world literature cannot be literature, bigger; what we are already doing, just more of it. It has to be different. The *categories* have to be different. ‘It is not the “actual” interconnection of “things”’, Max Weber wrote, ‘but the *conceptual* interconnection of *problems* which define the scope of the various sciences. A new “science” emerges where a new problem is pursued by a new method.’² That’s the point: world literature is not an object, it’s a *problem*, and a problem that asks for a new critical method: and no one has ever found a method by just reading more texts. That’s not how theories come into being; they need a leap, a wager—a hypothesis, to get started.

World literature: one and unequal

I will borrow this initial hypothesis from the world-system school of economic history, for which international capitalism is a system that

¹ I address the problem of the great unread in a companion piece to this article, ‘The Slaughterhouse of Literature’, forthcoming in a special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly* on ‘Formalism and Literary History’, spring 2000.

² Max Weber, ‘Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy’, 1904, in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, New York 1949, p. 68.

is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*: with a core, and a periphery (and a semiperiphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality. One, and unequal: *one* literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it's profoundly unequal. 'Foreign debt is as inevitable in Brazilian letters as in any other field', writes Roberto Schwarz in a splendid essay on 'The Importing of the Novel to Brazil': 'it's not simply an easily dispensable part of the work in which it appears, but a complex feature of it';³ and Itamar Even-Zohar, reflecting on Hebrew literature: 'Interference [is] a relationship between literatures, whereby a . . . source literature may become a source of direct or indirect loans [*Importing* of the novel, direct and indirect loans, foreign debt: see how economic metaphors have been subterraneously at work in literary history]—a source of loans for . . . a target literature . . . *There is no symmetry in literary interference. A target literature is, more often than not, interfered with by a source literature which completely ignores it.*'⁴

This is what one and unequal means: the destiny of a culture (usually a culture of the periphery, as Montserrat Iglesias Santos has specified)⁵ is intersected and altered by another culture (from the core) that 'completely ignores it'. A familiar scenario, this asymmetry in international power—and later I will say more about Schwarz's 'foreign debt' as a complex literary feature. Right now, let me spell out the consequences of taking an explanatory matrix from social history and applying it to literary history.

Distant reading

Writing about comparative social history, Marc Bloch once coined a lovely 'slogan', as he himself called it: 'years of analysis for a day of syn-

³ Roberto Schwarz, 'The Importing of the Novel to Brazil and Its Contradictions in the Work of Roberto Alencar', 1977, in *Misplaced Ideas*, London 1992, p. 50.

⁴ Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Laws of Literary Interference' in *Poetics Today*, 1990, pp. 54, 62.

⁵ Montserrat Iglesias Santos, 'El sistema literario: teoría empírica y teoría de los polisistemas', in Dario Villanueva (ed.), *Avances en teoría de la literatura*, Santiago de Compostela 1994, p. 339: 'It is important to emphasize that interferences occur most often at the periphery of the system.'

thesis',⁶ and if you read Braudel or Wallerstein you immediately see what Bloch had in mind. The text which is strictly Wallerstein's, his 'day of synthesis', occupies one third of a page, one fourth, maybe half; the rest are quotations (fourteen hundred, in the first volume of *The Modern World-System*). Years of analysis; other people's analysis, which Wallerstein's page synthesizes into a system.

Now, if we take this model seriously, the study of world literature will somehow have to reproduce this 'page'—which is to say: this relationship between analysis and synthesis—for the literary field. But in that case, literary history will quickly become very different from what it is now: it will become 'second hand': a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading*. Still ambitious, and actually even more so than before (world literature!); but the ambition is now directly proportional to *the distance from the text*: the more ambitious the project, the greater must the distance be.

The United States is the country of close reading, so I don't expect this idea to be particularly popular. But the trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon. This may have become an unconscious and invisible premiss by now, but it is an iron one nonetheless: you invest so much in individual texts *only* if you think that very few of them really matter. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. And if you want to look beyond the canon (and of course, world literature will do so: it would be absurd if it didn't!) close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it, it's designed to do the opposite. At bottom, it's a theological exercise—very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously—whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them. Distant reading: where distance, let me repeat it, *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is

⁶ Marc Bloch, 'Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes', *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1928.

infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more.⁷

The Western European novel: rule or exception?

Let me give you an example of the conjunction of distant reading and world literature. An example, not a model; and of course my example, based on the field I know (elsewhere, things may be very different). A few years ago, introducing Kojin Karatani's *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Fredric Jameson noticed that in the take-off of the modern Japanese novel, 'the raw material of Japanese social experience and the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction cannot always be welded together seamlessly'; and he referred in this respect to Masao Miyoshi's *Accomplices of Silence*, and Meenakshi Mukherjee's *Realism and Reality* (a study of the early Indian novel).⁸ And it's true, these books return quite often to the complicated 'problems' (Mukherjee's term) arising from the encounter of western form and Japanese or Indian reality.

Now, that the same configuration should occur in such different cultures as India and Japan—this was curious; and it became even more curious when I realized that Roberto Schwarz had independently discovered very much the same pattern in Brazil. So, eventually, I started using these pieces of evidence to reflect on the relationship between markets and forms; and then, without really knowing what I was doing, began to treat Jameson's insight as if it were—one should always be cautious with these claims, but there is really no other way to say it—as if it were a *law of literary evolution*: in cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials.

⁷ Or to quote Weber again: 'concepts are primarily analytical instruments for the intellectual mastery of empirical data'. ('Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy', p. 106.) Inevitably, the larger the field one wants to study, the greater the need for abstract 'instruments' capable of mastering empirical reality.

⁸ Fredric Jameson, 'In the Mirror of Alternate Modernities', in Karatani Kojin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Durham-London 1993, p. xiii.

This first idea expanded into a little cluster of laws,⁹ and it was all very interesting, but . . . it was still just an idea; a conjecture that had to be tested, possibly on a large scale, and so I decided to follow the wave of diffusion of the modern novel (roughly: from 1750 to 1950) in the pages of literary history. Gasperetti and Goscilo on late eighteenth-century Eastern Europe;¹⁰ Toschi and Martí-López on early nineteenth-century Southern Europe;¹¹ Franco and Sommer on mid-century Latin America;¹² Frieden on the Yiddish novels of the 1860s;¹³ Moosa, Said and Allen on

⁹ I have begun to sketch them out in the last chapter of the *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (Verso: London 1998), and this is more or less how they sound: second, the formal compromise is usually prepared by a massive wave of West European translations; third, the compromise itself is generally unstable (Miyoshi has a great image for this: the 'impossible programme' of Japanese novels); but fourth, in those rare instances when the impossible programme succeeds, we have genuine formal revolutions.

¹⁰ 'Given the history of its formative stage, it is no surprise that the early Russian novel contains a host of conventions popularized in French and British literature', writes David Gasperetti in *The Rise of the Russian Novel* (De Kalb 1998, p. 5). And Helena Goscilo, in her 'Introduction' to Krasicki's *Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom: 'The Adventures* is read most fruitfully in the context of the West European literature on which it drew heavily for inspiration.' (Ignacy Krasicki, *The Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*, Evanston 1992, p. xv.)

¹¹ 'There was a demand for foreign products, and production had to comply', explains Luca Toschi speaking of the Italian narrative market around 1800 ('Alle origini della narrativa di romanzo in Italia', in Massimo Saltafuso (ed.), *Il viaggio del narrare*, Florence 1989, p. 19). A generation later, in Spain, 'readers are not interested in the originality of the Spanish novel; their only desire is that it would adhere to those foreign models with which they have become familiar': and so, concludes Elisa Martí-López, one may well say that between 1800 and 1850 'the Spanish novel is being written in France' (Elisa Martí-López, 'La orfandad de la novela española: política editorial y creación literaria a mediados del siglo XIX', *Bulletin Hispanique*, 1997).

¹² 'Obviously, lofty ambitions were not enough. All too often the nineteenth century Spanish-American novel is clumsy and inept, with a plot derived at second hand from the contemporary European Romantic novel.' (Jean Franco, *Spanish-American Literature*, Cambridge 1969, p. 56.) 'If heroes and heroines in mid-nineteenth century Latin American novels were passionately desiring one another across traditional lines . . . those passions might not have prospered a generation earlier. In fact, modernizing lovers were learning how to dream their erotic fantasies by reading the European romances they hoped to realize.' (Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1991, pp. 31-2.)

¹³ 'Yiddish writers parodied—appropriated, incorporated, and modified—diverse elements from European novels and stories.' (Ken Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction*, Albany 1995, p. x.)

the Arabic novels of the 1870s;¹⁴ Evin and Parla on the Turkish novels of the same years;¹⁵ Anderson on the Filipino *Noli Me Tangere*, of 1887; Zhao and Wang on turn-of-the-century Qing fiction;¹⁶ Obiechina, Irele and Quayson on West African novels between the 1920s and the 1950s¹⁷ (plus of course Karatani, Miyoshi, Mukherjee, Even-Zohar and Schwarz). Four continents, two hundred years, over twenty independent critical studies, and they all agreed: when a culture starts moving towards the modern novel, it's *always* as a compromise between foreign form and local materials. Jameson's 'law' had passed the test—the first test, anyway.¹⁸ ¹⁹ And actually more than that: it had completely reversed the received historical explanation of these matters: because if the compromise between the for-

¹⁴ Matti Moosa quotes the novelist Yahya Haqqi: 'there is no harm in admitting that the modern story came to us from the West. Those who laid down its foundations were persons influenced by European literature, particularly French literature. Although masterpieces of English literature were translated into Arabic, French literature was the fountain of our story.' (Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, 1970, 2nd ed. 1997, p. 93.) For Edward Said, 'at some point writers in Arabic became aware of European novels and began to write works like them' (Edward Said, *Beginnings*, 1975, New York 1985, p. 81). And Roger Allen: 'In more literary terms, increasing contacts with Western literatures led to translations of works of European fiction into Arabic, followed by their adaptation and imitation, and culminating in the appearance of an indigenous tradition of modern fiction in Arabic.' (Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, Syracuse 1995, p. 12.)

¹⁵ 'The first novels in Turkey were written by members of the new intelligentsia, trained in government service and well-exposed to French literature', writes Ahmet O. Evin (*Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel*, Minneapolis 1983, p. 10); and Jale Parla: 'the early Turkish novelists combined the traditional narrative forms with the examples of the western novel' ('Desiring Tellers, Fugitive Tales: Don Quixote Rides Again, This Time in Istanbul', forthcoming).

¹⁶ 'The narrative dislocation of the sequential order of events is perhaps the most outstanding impression late Qing writers received when they read or translated Western fiction. At first, they tried to tidy up the sequence of the events back into their pre-narrated order. When such tidying was not feasible during translation, an apologetic note would be inserted . . . Paradoxically, when he alters rather than follows the original, the translator does not feel it necessary to add an apologetic note.' (Henry Y.H. Zhao, *The Uneasy Narrator: Chinese Fiction from the Traditional to the Modern*, Oxford 1995, p. 150.) 'Late Qing writers enthusiastically renewed their heritage with the help of foreign models', writes David Der-wei Wang: 'I see the late Qing as the beginning of the Chinese literary "modern" because writers' pursuit of novelty was no longer contained within indigenously defined barriers but was inextricably defined by the multilingual, crosscultural trafficking of ideas, technologies, and powers in the wake of nineteenth-century Western expansionism.' (*Fin-de-siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849–1911*, Stanford 1997, pp. 5, 19.)

eign and the local is so ubiquitous, then those independent paths that are usually taken to be the rule of the rise of the novel (the Spanish, the French, and especially the British case)—well, *they're not the rule at all, they're the exception*. They come first, yes, but they're not at all typical. The 'typical' rise of the novel is Krasicki, Kemal, Rizal, Maran—not Defoe.

Experiments with history

See the beauty of distant reading plus world literature: they go against the grain of national historiography. And they do so in the form of *an experiment*. You define a unit of analysis (like here, the formal compromise),²⁰

¹⁷ 'One essential factor shaping West African novels by indigenous writers was the fact that they appeared after the novels on Africa written by non-Africans . . . the foreign novels embody elements which indigenous writers had to react against when they set out to write.' (Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, Cambridge 1975, p. 17.) 'The first Dahomean novel, *Doguiçimi* . . . is interesting as an experiment in recasting the oral literature of Africa within the form of a French novel.' (Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, Bloomington 1990, p. 147.) 'It was the rationality of realism that seemed adequate to the task of forging a national identity at the conjuncture of global realities . . . the rationalism of realism dispersed in texts as varied as newspapers, Onitsha market literature, and in the earliest titles of the African Writers Series that dominated the discourses of the period.' (Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, Bloomington 1997, p. 162.)

¹⁸ In the seminar where I first presented this 'second-hand' criticism, Sarah Golstein asked a very good, *Candide*-like question: You decide to rely on another critic. Fine. But what if he's wrong? My reply. If he's wrong, you are wrong too, and you soon know, because you don't find any corroboration—you don't find Goscilo, Martí-López, Sommer, Evin, Zhao, Irele . . . And it's not just that you don't find positive corroboration; sooner or later you find all sorts of facts you cannot explain, and your hypothesis is falsified, in Popper's famous formulation, and you must throw it away. Fortunately, this hasn't been the case so far, and Jameson's insight still stands.

¹⁹ OK, I confess, in order to test the conjecture I actually did read some of these 'first novels' in the end (Krasicki's *Adventures of Mr. Nicholas Wisdom*, Abramowitsch's *Little Man*, Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, Futabatei's *Ukigumo*, René Maran's *Batouala*, Paul Hazoumé's *Doguiçimi*). This kind of 'reading', however, no longer produces interpretations but merely *tests* them: it's not the beginning of the critical enterprise, but its appendix. And then, here you don't really read the *text* anymore, but rather through the *text*, looking for your unit of analysis. The task is constrained from the start; it's a reading without freedom.

²⁰ For practical purposes, the larger the geographical space one wants to study, the smaller should the unit of analysis be: a concept (in our case), a device, a trope, a limited narrative unit—something like this. In a follow-up paper, I hope to sketch out the diffusion of stylistic 'seriouness' (Auerbach's keyword in *Mimesis*) in nineteenth and twentieth century novels.

and then follow its metamorphoses in a variety of environments²¹—until, ideally, *all* of literary history becomes a long chain of related experiments: a ‘dialogue between fact and fancy’, as Peter Medawar calls it: ‘between what could be true, and what is in fact the case’.²² Apt words for this research, in the course of which, as I was reading my fellow historians, it became clear that the encounter of western forms and local reality did indeed produce everywhere a structural compromise—as the law predicted—but also, that the compromise itself was taking rather different forms. At times, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century and in Asia, it tended to be very unstable:²³ an ‘impossible pro-

²¹ How to set up a reliable sample—that is to say, what series of national literatures and individual novels provide a satisfactory test of a theory’s predictions—is of course quite a complex issue. In this preliminary sketch, my sample (and its justification) leave much to be desired.

²² Scientific research ‘begins as a story about a Possible World’, Medawar goes on, ‘and ends by being, as nearly as we can make it, a story about real life.’ His words are quoted by James Bird in *The Changing World of Geography*, Oxford 1993, p. 5. Bird himself offers a very elegant version of the experimental model.

²³ Aside from Miyoshi and Karatani (for Japan), Mukherjee (for India), and Schwarz (for Brazil), the compositional paradoxes and the instability of the formal compromise are often mentioned in the literature on the Turkish, Chinese and Arabic novel. Discussing Namik Kemal’s *Intibah*, Ahmet Evin points out how ‘the merger of the two themes, one based on the traditional family life and the other on the yearnings of a prostitute, constitute the first attempt in Turkish fiction to achieve a type of psychological dimension observed in European novels within a thematic framework based on Turkish life. However, due both to the incompatibility of the themes and to the difference in the degree of emphasis placed on each, the unity of the novel is blemished. The structural defects of *Intibah* are symptomatic of the differences between the methodology and concerns of the Turkish literary tradition on the one hand and those of the European novel on the other.’ (Ahmet O. Evin, *Origins and Development of the Turkish Novel*, p. 68; emphasis mine.) Jale Parla’s evaluation of the Tanzimat period sounds a similar note: ‘behind the inclination towards renovation stood a dominant and dominating Ottoman ideology that recast the new ideas into a mould fit for the Ottoman society. The mould, however, was supposed to hold two different epistemologies that rested on irreconcilable axioms. It was inevitable that this mould would crack and literature, in one way or another, reflects the cracks.’ (‘Desiring Tellers, Fugitive Tales: Don Quixote Rides Again, This Time in Istanbul’, emphasis mine.) In his discussion of the 1913 novel *Zaynab*, by Husayn Haykal, Roger Allen echoes Schwarz and Mukherjee (‘it is all too easy to point to the problems of psychological fallacy here, as Hamid, the student in Cairo acquainted with Western works on liberty and justice such as those of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, proceeds to discuss the question of marriage in Egyptian society on such a lofty plane with his parents, who have always lived deep in the Egyptian countryside’: *The Arabic Novel*, p. 34; emphasis

gram', as Miyoshi says of Japan.²⁴ At other times it was not so: at the beginning and at the end of the wave, for instance (Poland, Italy and Spain at one extreme; and West Africa on the other), historians describe novels that had, certainly, their own problems—but not problems arising from the clash of irreconcilable elements.²⁵

mine). Henry Zhao emphasizes from his very title—*The Uneasy Narrator*: and see the splendid discussion of uneasiness that opens the book—the complications generated by the encounter of western plots and Chinese narrative: 'A salient feature of late Qing fiction', he writes, 'is the greater frequency of narrative intrusions than in any previous period of Chinese vernacular fiction . . . The huge amount of directions trying to explain the newly adopted techniques betrays the narrator's uneasiness about the instability of his status . . . the narrator feels the threat of interpretive diversification . . . moral commentaries become more tendentious to make the judgments unequivocal', and at times the drift towards narratorial overkill is so overpowering that a writer may sacrifice narrative suspense 'to show that he is morally impeccable' (*The Uneasy Narrator*, pp. 69–71).

²⁴ In some cases, even translations of European novels went through all sorts of incredible somersaults. In Japan, in 1880, Tsubouchi's translation of *The Bride of Lammermoor* appeared under the title *Shumpu jowa* [*Spring breeze love story*], and Tsubouchi himself 'was not beyond excising the original text when the material proved inappropriate for his audience, or converting Scott's imagery into expressions corresponding more closely to the language of traditional Japanese literature' (Marleigh Grayer Ryan, 'Commentary' to Putabatei Shimei's *Ukigumo*, New York 1967, pp. 41–2). In the Arabic world, writes Matti Moosa, 'in many instances the translators of Western fiction took extensive and sometimes unwarranted liberties with the original text of a work. Yaqub Sarruf not only changed the title of Scott's *Talisman* to *Qalb al-Asad wa Salah al-Din* (*The Lion Heart and Saladin*), but also admitted that he had taken the liberty of omitting, adding, and changing parts of this romance to suit what he believed to be his audience's taste . . . Other translators changed the titles and the names of the characters and the contents, in order, they claimed, to make the translated work more acceptable to their readers and more consistent with the native literary tradition.' (*The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, p. 106.) The same general pattern holds for late Qing literature, where 'translations were almost without exception tampered with . . . the most serious way of tampering was to paraphrase the whole novel to make it a story with Chinese characters and Chinese background . . . Almost all of these translations suffered from abridgment . . . Western novels became sketchy and speedy, and looked more like Chinese traditional fiction.' (Henry Zhao, *The Uneasy Narrator*, p. 229.)

²⁵ Why this difference? Probably, because in Southern Europe the wave of French translations encountered a local reality (and local narrative traditions) that weren't that different after all, and as a consequence, the composition of foreign form and local material proved easy. In West Africa, the opposite situation: although the novelists themselves had been influenced by Western literature, the wave of translations had been much weaker than elsewhere, and local narrative conventions were for their part extremely different from European ones (just think of orality); as the desire for the 'foreign technology' was relatively bland—and further

I hadn't expected such a spectrum of outcomes, so at first I was taken aback, and only later realized that this was probably the most valuable finding of them all, because it showed that world literature was indeed a system—but a system of *variations*. The system was one, not uniform. The pressure from the Anglo-French core *tried* to make it uniform, but it could never fully erase the reality of difference. (See here, by the way, how the study of world literature is—inevitably—a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world.) The system was one, not uniform. And, retrospectively, of course it had to be like this: if after 1750 the novel arises just about everywhere as a compromise between West European patterns and local reality—well, local reality was different in the various places, just as western influence was also very uneven: much stronger in Southern Europe around 1800, to return to my example, than in West Africa around 1940. The forces in play kept changing, and so did the compromise that resulted from their interaction. And this, incidentally, opens a fantastic field of inquiry for comparative morphology (the systematic study of how forms vary in space and time, which is also the only reason to keep the adjective 'comparative' in comparative literature): but comparative morphology is a complex issue, that deserves its own paper.

Forms as abstracts of social relationships

Let me now add a few words on that term 'compromise'—by which I mean something a little different from what Jameson had in mind in his introduction to Karatani. For him, the relationship is fundamentally a

discouraged, of course, by the anti-colonial politics of the 1950s—local conventions could play their role relatively undisturbed. Obiechina and Quayson emphasize the polemical relationship of early West African novels vis-à-vis European narrative: 'The most noticeable difference between novels by native West Africans and those by non-native using the West African setting, is the important position which the representation of oral tradition is given by the first, and its almost total absence in the second.' (Emmanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, p. 25.) 'Continuity in the literary strategic formation we have identified is best defined in term of the continuing affirmation of mythopoia rather than of realism for the definition of identity . . . That this derives from a conceptual opposition to what is perceived as a Western form of realism is difficult to doubt. It is even pertinent to note in this regard that in the work of major African writers such as Achebe, Armah, and Ngugi, the movement of their work has been from protocols of realist representation to those of mythopoic experimentation.' (Ato Quayson, *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, p. 164.)

binary one: 'the abstract formal patterns of Western novel construction' and 'the raw material of Japanese social experience': form and content, basically.²⁶ For me, it's more of a triangle: foreign form, local material—and local form. Simplifying somewhat: foreign *plot*; local *characters*; and then, local *narrative voice*: and it's precisely in this third dimension that these novels seem to be most unstable—most uneasy, as Zhao says of the late Qing narrator. Which makes sense: the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation, and when foreign 'formal patterns' (or actual foreign presence, for that matter) make characters behave in strange ways (like Bunzo, or Ibarra, or Brás Cubas), then of course comment becomes uneasy—garrulous, erratic, rudderless.

'Interferences', Even-Zohar calls them: powerful literatures making life hard for the others—making *structure* hard. And Schwarz: 'a part of the original historical conditions reappears as a sociological form . . . In this sense, forms are the abstract of specific social relationships.'²⁷ Yes, and in our case the historical conditions reappear as a sort of 'crack' in the form; as a faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview: the world goes in the strange direction dictated by an outside power; the worldview tries to make sense of it, and is thrown off balance all the time. Like Rizal's voice (oscillating between Catholic melodrama and Enlightenment sarcasm),²⁸ or Futabatei's (caught between Bunzo's 'Russian' behavior, and the Japanese audience inscribed in the text), or Zhao's hypertrophic narrator, who has completely lost control of the plot, but still tries to dominate it at all costs. This is what Schwarz meant with that 'foreign debt' that becomes a 'complex feature' of the text: the

²⁶ The same point is made in a great article by Antônio Cândido: 'We [Latin American literatures] never create original expressive forms or basic expressive techniques, in the sense that we mean by romanticism, on the level of literary movements; the psychological novel, on the level of genres; free indirect style, on that of writing . . . the various nativisms never rejected the use of the imported literary forms . . . what was demanded was the choice of new *themes*, of different *sentiments*. ('Literature and Underdevelopment', in César Fernández Moreno, Julio Ortega, Ivan A. Shulman (eds), *Latin America in Its Literature*, New York 1980, pp. 272–3.)

²⁷ 'The Importing of the Novel To Brazil', p. 53.

²⁸ Rizal's solution, or lack thereof, is probably also related to his extraordinarily wide social spectrum (*Noli Me Tangere*, among other things, is the text that inspired Benedict Anderson to link the novel and the nation-state): in a nation with no independence, an ill-defined ruling class, no common language and hundreds of disparate characters, it's hard to speak 'for the whole', and the narrator's voice cracks under the effort.

foreign presence 'interferes' with the very *utterance* of the novel.²⁹ The one-and-unequal literary system is not just an external network here, it doesn't remain *outside* the text: it's embedded well into its form.

Trees, waves and cultural history

Forms are the abstract of social relationships: so, formal analysis is in its own modest way an analysis of power. (That's why comparative morphology is such a fascinating field: studying how forms vary, you discover how symbolic *power* varies from place to place.) And indeed, sociological formalism has always been my interpretive method, and I think that it's particularly appropriate for world literature . . . But, unfortunately, at this point I must stop, because my competence stops. Once it became clear that the key variable of the experiment was the narrator's voice, well, a genuine formal analysis was off limits for me, because it required a linguistic competence that I couldn't even dream of (French, English, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, Chinese and Portuguese, just for the core of the argument). And probably, no matter what the object of analysis is, there will always be a point where the study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature, in a sort of cosmic and inevitable division of labour. Inevitable not just for practical reasons, but for theoretical ones. This is a large issue, but let me at least sketch its outline.

When historians have analysed culture on a world scale (or on a large scale anyway), they have tended to use two basic cognitive metaphors: the tree and the wave. The tree, the phylogenetic tree derived from Darwin, was the tool of comparative philology: language families branching off from each other—Slavo-Germanic from Aryan-Greco-Italo-Celtic, then

²⁹ In a few lucky cases, the structural weakness may turn into a strength, as in Schwarz's interpretation of Machado, where the 'volatility' of the narrator becomes 'the stylization of the behaviour of the Brazilian ruling class': not a flaw any longer, but the very point of the novel: 'Everything in Machado de Assis's novels is coloured by the *volatility*—used and abused in different degrees—of their narrators. The critics usually look at it from the point of view of literary technique or of the author's humour. There are great advantages in seeing it as the stylization of the behaviour of the Brazilian ruling class. Instead of seeking disinterestedness, and the confidence provided by impartiality, Machado's narrator shows off his impudence, in a gamut which runs from cheap gibes, to literary exhibitionism, and even to critical acts.' (Roberto Schwarz, 'The Poor Old Woman and Her Portraitist', 1983, in *Misplaced Ideas*, p. 94.)

Balto-Slavic from Germanic, then Lithuanian from Slavic. And this kind of tree allowed comparative philology to solve that great puzzle which was also perhaps the first world system of culture: Indo-European: a family of languages spreading from India to Ireland (and perhaps not just languages, a common cultural repertoire, too: but here the evidence is notoriously shakier). The other metaphor, the wave, was also used in historical linguistics (as in Schmidt's 'wave hypothesis', that explained certain overlaps among languages), but it played a role in many other fields as well: the study of technological diffusion, for instance, or the fantastic interdisciplinary theory of the 'wave of advance' by Cavalli-Sforza and Ammerman (a geneticist and an archaeologist), which explains how agriculture spread from the fertile crescent in the Middle East towards the North-West and then throughout Europe.

Now, trees and waves are both metaphors—but except for this, they have absolutely nothing in common. The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity: one tree, with many branches: from Indo-European, to dozens of different languages. The wave is the opposite: it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity: Hollywood films conquering one market after another (or English swallowing language after language). Trees need geographical *discontinuity* (in order to branch off from each other, languages must first be separated in space, just like animal species); waves dislike barriers, and thrive on geographical *continuity* (from the viewpoint of a wave, the ideal world is a pond). Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to; waves are what markets do. And so on. Nothing in common, between the two metaphors. But—*they both work*. Cultural history is made of trees *and* waves—the wave of agricultural advance supporting the tree of Indo-European languages, which is then swept by new waves of linguistic and cultural contact . . . And as world culture oscillates between the two mechanisms, its products are inevitably composite ones. Compromises, as in Jameson's law. That's why the law works: because it intuitively captures the intersection of the two mechanisms. Think of the modern novel: certainly a wave (and I've actually called it a wave a few times)—but a wave that runs into the branches of local traditions,³⁰ and is always significantly transformed by them.

³⁰ 'Grafting processes', Miyoshi calls them; Schwarz speaks of 'the implantation of the novel, and of its realist *strand* in particular', and Wang of 'transplanting Western narrative typologies'. And indeed, Belinsky had already described Russian literature as 'a *transplanted* rather than indigenous growth' in 1843.

This, then, is the basis for the division of labour between national and world literature: national literature, for people who see trees; world literature, for people who see waves. Division of labour . . . and challenge; because both metaphors work, yes, but that doesn't mean that they work equally well. The products of cultural history are always composite ones: but which is the dominant mechanism in their composition? The internal, or the external one? The nation or the world? The tree or the wave? There is no way to settle this controversy once and for all—fortunately: because comparatists need controversy. They have always been too shy in the presence of national literatures, too diplomatic: as if one had English, American, German literature—and then, next door, a sort of little parallel universe where comparatists studied a second set of literatures, trying not to disturb the first set. No; the universe is the same, the literatures are the same, we just look at them from a different viewpoint; and you become a comparatist for a very simple reason: *because you are convinced that that viewpoint is better*. It has greater explanatory power; it's conceptually more elegant; it avoids that ugly 'one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness'; whatever. The point is that there is no other justification for the study of world literature (and for the existence of departments of comparative literature) but this: to be a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures—especially the local literature. If comparative literature is not this, it's nothing. Nothing. 'Don't delude yourself', writes Stendhal of his favourite character: 'for you, there is no middle road.' The same is true for us.

TOM NAIRN

UKANIA UNDER BLAIR

CONSTITUTIONAL ALTERATIONS normally require an alteration of the communal will: that is, a national or nationalist identity motion of some kind, whether of resentment, ascendancy, defeat or rebirth. Such a will might be stimulated and led 'from above'; this entails, however, the existence of a dissentient ruling elite which thinks in constitutional terms, and puts state reform resolutely ahead of social reform and economic policy. But such an order of priorities is quite alien to the modern United Kingdom ruling class—indeed nothing has been more alien to it. Constitutionalism had been familiar enough to its early-modern predecessors of the period 1640–1707. But the state constructed at that time was then reconfigured primarily through contests *against* what appeared as the more aggressive modernity shown in the revolutions of 1776 and 1789—that is, the modern constitutionalism out of which today's nation-state world has mainly arisen. In those contests the pioneer itself had become tradition-minded and custom-bound—'empirical' in its philosophy and pragmatic in its political attitudes. British parliamentarism grew perfectly inseparable from such attitudes and Blair's New Labour victory of 1997 was still far more an expression of them than a repudiation.

Without that more decisive break—a rupture on the level of grammar, as it were, rather than rhetoric—New Labour's political renaissance could only be undertaken 'the wrong way round'. It was fated by its own history to move periphery-first. Authority had to be conceded outwards without the prior establishment of a new central framework capable of encompassing all the new energies and demands. When General de Gaulle decided it was time that France 'married its own century', he set up a new republican constitution to consummate the wedding. In Germany and Italy, new federal or regional patterns of government were imposed

after Fascism, in order to modulate and confine the unitary state. In Spain the post-Franco democracy designed and enabled the Catalan, Basque, and other autonomous governments, by first of all erecting a radically novel political and juridical mainframe.

But in the United Kingdom the mainframe itself has remained sacrosanct. Behind a firework-display of fizzling rhetoric about change and modernization, it has simply been carried forward, and trusted to go on 'evolving'. Trust it, and therefore us: things will settle down and generally sort themselves out, while in the meantime (which could mean a lifetime) things can go on in the comfortable, circular kind of way people (i.e. England's people) are used to, albeit with some changes round the edges. In France and Spain new state constitutions were seen as the necessary condition of a political break with the past. But after Thatcher, only a new *politics* was demanded, not a new framework for political living—and that in order to redeem and continue the past, not to break with it. Recent episodes of UK history may have come to be despised and rejected; but not the longer perspective of Britishness, within which success and world leadership had been for so long celebrated. Only on the periphery had 'radical' changes become unavoidable, in the more European sense of ruptures or definite new departures. For 'Middle England' itself, these were reckoned to be superfluous—or at least indefinitely postponable.

There were in fact interesting poll and survey indications in the later 1990s that English opinion may have been a lot more open to new departures than party political leaders assumed. Unfortunately, it was the assumptions of the latter which counted. They continued to believe that dramatic departures of style and communication accompanied by minimal, adaptive changes to the constitution were most in accord with the subjacent mood. Hence some departures from the stick-insect rigidity of Thatcherism were in order—but not of such a kind as to frighten the horses. Socialism had been exorcised in accordance with the same supposed mood. After which, it would have seemed damnably un-British to start imposing a Hispanic-style revolution up top: surely some modernization-touches would do instead? Enhanced (only cynics would say 'disguised') by brilliant new ideas? Might not some thoroughly intelligent *bricolage*, plus a strong dose of accelerationism, technicism (etc.) restore the basis of Anglo-British statehood for long enough? And keep the restorers in governmental business for long enough, too?

Vectors of archaism

The past does not simply 'survive'. To be reproduced effectively within modernity it requires vehicles, social devices and intentions. Through these what would otherwise be fossils become allied to new interests and passions, acquiring the style (even the fashionability) demanded by what the Situationists originally called *la société du spectacle*. One of the key vectors for this is economics. It is still a common error to believe that the Habsburg Empire so wonderfully captured in Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* was economically hopeless or doomed. In fact it did fairly well until killed off by war and defeat. David Good and other historians have shown how notably it was advancing by 1914, after a period in which Austria-Hungary had indeed lagged behind industrially. Society there may have been unviable, and particularly the contradiction-riven state—but this was not for reasons rooted in economic development alone. Like other deplorable truisms of the time to come, 'It's the economy, stupid!' was quite familiar in Vienna.

'Was the Habsburg Empire an economic failure in the sense that it could not engineer modern economic growth prior to its collapse?' asks Good. His answer is 'an unequivocal "no".' The Empire grew at a significantly faster rate than the United Kingdom over the period between 1570 and 1914, and its GNP per capita was by then equivalent to that of France. Of course it straddled the ancient socio-economic gap between West and East, and hence contained within its own borders a steep 'development gradient'. Yet the latter, Good points out, was less steep than the one between the North and the South of the United States. The latter's 'impeccable credentials' as a model of successful capitalist evolution have been largely the result of backward projection from post-1945. Although it had not caught up with Belgium, the English Midlands or the Ruhr, Franz-Joseph's Empire stood comparison with Mediterranean and peripheral Western Europe (which meant, with most of it). The implication is plain, if disagreeable to economics-worshippers: there was no straightforward relationship between development and political success or stability. 'Modernization' never fails to create contradictions and stir things up. It provided Vienna (today, London) with greater resources to buy off opposition, dangle bribes and be terribly broad-minded; but at the same time, it made the unbribable, the resentful and the contrary far more aware of their unequal, left-behind status. Not everyone can be bought off equally. Any measure of success—like the arrival of a

railway, the opening of the first supermarket, sudden access to college education—generates an irascible appetite for more, and more quickly. The broad-minded (blueprint in hand) perceive this as unreasonable: impatient narrowness, egotism, jumping the queue. Thus a grander, encompassing, controlling sort of identity comes to oppose more particular, self-assertive, 'I'm-as-good-as-you' identities. The sharper the impact of socio-economic change, the more this clash turns towards nationalism—the sense that life-or-death may be at stake here, unless control of development is made to lie where it should (with us, not them).

Success in statistical tables and growth-leagues does not automatically favour a grateful, conserving philosophy of evensong, egotism and familial values. The British Conservatives discovered this in the late 1980s, not long before they fell helplessly through the floor. Neither does stagnation and the sense of retreat or confinement encourage either revolution or nationalism (except among tiny minorities who know in the abstract that what people tolerate is actually 'intolerable', and inform them of this). There may have been some formative periods of industrialization when such combinations were possible—times when modernity existed only in pockets, as the privileged accident of one nation or another. But its generalization has swept this away. Along with the debris has gone what Emmanuel Todd has recently baptized as *L'Illusion économique* the notion that economic development itself is the sufficient condition of any specific political or state pattern, or of the triumph of any particular ideology. The universal necessary condition of all advance ceases to be the special explanation of any one forward movement.

Modernity required—and in its later evolution goes on requiring—certain new economic and social circumstances. It does not follow that these circumstances determine modernity in the concrete sense of its lived and acculturized evolution. However one-sided, the socio-economic renaissance of Thatcherism had more strongly undermined the class basis of a traditionalist state than anything before it. Its deregulation and attacks on corporatism corroded the familial sense of a societal order which—like that of the Habsburgs—had evolved over time an arm's length rapprochement with an earlier phase of capitalism. After the demolition of this structure, nation and state no longer retained their long-established fit. Yet at the same time Thatcherism worshipped and propped up the state. On that level it was utterly philistine. Exaggerated

loyalism and hysteria over timelessness became a kind of compensation for the regime's self-conscious economic radicalism—as if only endorsement of monarchic and other rituals, and of the state's untouchable unity, could prevent *everything* that was solid from melting into the air.

Much did melt, of course. But by no means everything. It was probably the successful—or half-successful—side of Conservative economic regeneration which helped to carry forward the archaisms of Britishness into a new age. Although at a heavy cost, that aspect of it furnished a comparative advantage and stability which the 1997 change of political regime then inherited and exploited. In striking contrast to all previous Labour governments, Blair was able to undertake his devolutionary measures against the background of an over-strong currency and significant business support. His pro-European stance and agreement (albeit mainly 'in principle') to the common currency ensured a new level of City and big-business tolerance—or even approval—reflected in the climate of a famously Moosbruggerish British press.

Yet that same good fortune was bound also to rehabilitate some of the anachronism carried forward with it. A half-revolution must constantly insure itself against whatever has not been destroyed—against the past still there and in arms, as it were, against an identity discountenanced, even humiliated, yet not really broken up and cast into the tail-race of history. Huge New Labour efforts had gone into presenting this insurance policy between 1995 and 1997. It seemed the only way to win the kind of electoral victory which the British system prescribed. Over-adaptation to the economics of Thatcherism and deregulated liberalism, extreme caniness over all matters fiscal and financial, and a convert-like disavowal of Socialist money-throwing antics: these now became the surprising preconditions of renewal and change. Yet it would obviously be quite hard to avoid a general or blatant conservatism from arising around foundations like these. Hence the absolute necessity for an ostentatious, perfectly sincere and fireproof form of 'radicalism' to balance that tendency. The Tories had counterposed a mummified statism against their radical economic upheavals. The Labourites now had to offset their mummified economics with an ostentatious display of verbosely political radicalism. We have seen something of what this meant—'youthism', high-technicism, millennial and style-mania, and the accumulation of think tanks and divining rods in appropriate official, quasi-official and entirely spontaneous polyhedrons.

Rather than from plutocratic plotting and self-interest, it is important to observe how this arose out of an objective dilemma. It derives from the structural fate of a decrepit multinational polity whose inherited nature renders it incapable of either solving its problems or dissolving them. It can only pretend to do both, with a kind of mounting insouciance and *braggadocio*. Ultra-prudent and custodial economics could not help favouring an equivalent conservation of the state—and so the prolongation of 1688–1707 anachronism. But at the same time, real changes of state had become unavoidable on the periphery, as had a distinctly unconservative style of ideas and public policy. Thus the Scots were given back their Parliament, the Welsh were awarded a political voice, and the Northern Irish were reconciled to a new and only half-British Protectorate—all amid a clamorous fanfare of radicalism suggesting that these were but early installments of a gathering revolution.

At the centre of affairs, however, the ‘revolution’ was meant from the start to be far more decorous, indeed not revolutionary at all. Some changes to Europe’s most grotesque political relic, the House of Lords; a mild form of proportional representation (if approved by referendum); a half-Freedom of Information Act; an upgraded style of monarchy, affected (but not carried away) by Princess Diana’s example; a proper place at Europe’s heart (when economics permit, again via referendum)—all these decorous shifts were to occur within a comfortably indeterminate time frame, implying further long cadences of stable British existence. From its first day in office, Blairism has planned to last longer than Thatcherism did. Thus what counts most in the ‘gathering revolution’ is clearly the gathering part; execution will come later, as and when opportunity allows (or quite possibly, fails to allow). And what if it gathers only to clear away again, or to be politely refused in referenda? Well, the deep assumption remains that Britain and ‘Middle England’—the imaginary repository of the national life-force, nowadays usually assigned to southern suburbia—will survive that. Deeper down, in the central processing unit (or as would once have been said, the controlling instinct) of Britishness, this continuity is what matters most. Survival: in whatever grandeur remains possible.

A prophecy of end-time

About the contradictions of Blairism one thing will never be said: ‘they could not have known’. In fact the *responsables* of the New Order were

told, and it is already revealing to see how clearly they were told, that this time survival, continuity and grandeur would no longer be enough, however ably modulated and publicized. Political revolution was required. Only six months after Blair's electoral triumph, a study appeared with precisely that title: Anthony Barnett's *This Time: Our Constitutional Revolution*.¹ It had a cover picture showing the Union Jack at half mast over Buckingham Palace, in a nostalgic September light. This was appropriate, for the book's story is like Musil's, only much more amazing: the foundering of a crown-state recounted day by day, sometimes word by word, in contrast to the long ironic retrospect of *The Man Without Qualities*.

The British flag had only been raised over the royal London residence by popular demand. Previously the royal standard had only ever flown there when the monarch was physically present, a demonstration that regality was of greater importance than mere nationality. Kingdom was the important half of 'United Kingdom', even if Parliament had made inroads on the rest of it. However, the bare flagpole now looked offensive to the huge crowds mourning the death of the Princess of Wales. Its indifferent nakedness seemed to accuse their grief, and their caring—as if Queen Elizabeth and her household (then on their annual holiday at Balmoral) were also indifferent. Did they not care—or might they even be pleased—about the loss of their outcast daughter? In death the latter had acquired a title: 'the People's Princess'. Prime Minister Blair confirmed this after the fatal crash in Paris, in what was immediately seen as a stroke of public-relations genius. It was as if he scented from extremely far off the odour of a revolution from below.

There was a lot of gooey sentiment and romanticism mixed up with the resentment, of course, as both left- and right-wing critics of the mood insisted. But what did they expect? A century and a half of patient effort had gone into the formation of romantic-popular monarchism. It was a broader elite project pursued by governments of both left and right, which had long since cast national identity into this specific mould. That mould had been a form of control. Yet now, briefly, the same force was out of control and in the streets, as a mass idolization of somebody both 'inappropriate' and dead. Yet there were both Socialists and Reactionaries who found nothing to say but: 'This is a bit much!' In

¹ Vintage Books, December 1997.

truth nothing could have indicated more clearly the malaise of the electorate which had voted so resoundingly for radical change four months previously. Barnett was surely right to devote so much space to analysing the incident. It showed the availability of public opinion for a sort of change previously unthinkable. For all its sentimentality, he observes, the Diana cult none the less 'expressed a form of the contemporary that connects to the landslide of May 1st', and implied the possible 'normalization' of British political life. Under Thatcherism society had in an almost literal sense become 'divorced' from the old state, including its petrified monarchy. In the September Days of 1997 the divorce had been spontaneously completed, in 'a vast movement of people who by their very existence demonstrated that the premise of the 300-year-old British Constitution had been swept away. The people are now independent-minded and capable . . . The question now is whether the political elite will allow the constitutional transformation to proceed.'

His argument is of course that the renovated elite must not just allow but compel it to proceed: 'this time' is the only time likely to be available for a widely popular reconstruction of the state, a genuine revolution from above. Hence the urgency of tone in the book, and its sometimes hectoring manner. Behind it lies the sense (also the fear) of there being no other time coming. Even if launched from above, a revolution can only be 'genuine' when it meets and is modified by some positive response from below. The moments when such conjunction is possible are rare. To let one go would be folly.

There was only one way of realizing that moment—the route described in some detail over a number of years by Charter 88, the vigorous reform group which Barnett helped to found in the 1980s, and for some time led in the 1990s. It is not as if *This Time* were a lonely or eccentric cry from somewhere beneath the stones. The message came right out of the most significant non-party campaign of the 1990s, and many Labour Party leaders had professed warm sympathy with its aims. Since the somewhat miserable 300th anniversary commemorations of 1688's original revolutionary imposition, the Charter had pleaded passionately that enough was enough—even a standard UNO-issue off-the-shelf constitution would (some now thought) be better than William and Mary's quaint palimpsest of cod-feudal shards, early-modern scratchings and bipartisan 'traditions' reinvented so often that no one had the slightest idea what purpose they originally served. And surely, with some imagi-

nation and national pride, wouldn't the unthinkable become possible? A new British Constitution meriting its capital letter, inspired by the approaching century rather than the one before the one before last?

Barnett's indictment of the *ancien régime* takes up all the first part of his book ('The Meaning of 1997') and overflows constantly into the second ('Voicing the Constitution'). The reader is left by it in a kind of trance, like the suspension of belief that used to attack Ethiopian intellectuals of the 1970s when they returned home from studying abroad to confront the court of Lion-King Haile Selassie: *How is all this still possible?* At the end of the twentieth century? With the democratization of the globe in full spate, and Nelson Mandela running South Africa? *How dare it endure one day longer on earth?*

The least that could be expected after May 1997 was surely a statement of some exit plans, and a sketch of the replacement. This need not be a *pronunciamento* accompanied by a detailed blueprint: instead, what the author recommended was something like Anthony Giddens's 'Utopian realism'. What this meant was 'articulating clear, principled goals and then setting about them with practical measures that are given the space necessary to be assessed in a context of consent.'² On the other hand, such a programme does have to be uttered. With all the respect due to Karl Popper and George Soros (both suitably endorsed in *This Time*) even a pragmatic, anti-grand-theory prospectus must at least be adumbrated, since without that 'the country has no clear idea what "the greatest constitutional change for a century" means and where it is supposed to lead'.

By the end of the year Blair took office, however, there was still no such idea in place. As Barnett worriedly pointed out in December 1997, the statement had been promised before the election, and then simply never delivered. Now the democratic revival which had been so strongly in the air of both 1 May and early September needed its momentum to be kept going. The practical measures undertaken (like devolution) demanded 'a sense of larger purpose ... In terms of the constitution, a clear statement of principles and purpose. The sooner the better.'

² *This Time*, p. 273

Methodone kingdom

Alas, 'the sooner the better' implies the later the worse. As winter turned into spring, the government's first anniversary was celebrated, and Mr Blair's first Cabinet 'reshuffle' of July 1998 ensconced New Labour's authority more firmly, it became steadily clearer that the first installment might well be the last. The maximal and daring might already have collapsed into the minimal and safeguarding. No statement of grand constitutional renewal was ever to come. Instead, there would be another long-lived 'regime' of decline-management—a generational reign, as it were, comparable to that of Mrs Thatcher in 1979–97. Once more, 'radicalism' would boil down to staying afloat, albeit in an interestingly different way.

As with the early concessions to Scotland, Wales and Ireland, some constitutional changes were still needed to secure that way. One was a form of proportionality in political elections, to qualify the desperate lurches and 'landslide' turnarounds of the past. The second was some change to Great Britain's revising chamber. Alongside the 'modernized monarchy' rendered critical by the Diana affair, a more 'acceptable' House of Lords was also needed. These vectors of continuity had themselves to be upgraded, simply to pursue the time-honoured role assigned them. They certainly represented overdue episodes of modernization. But in the hardening context of Blair's 2000 regime they could also be stability-reforms. Thus the 'radical' would be a realignment of the archaic, rather than the straightforward replacement which Charter 88 and *This Time* pleaded for. Electoral change was the more important of the two. The fantastic lurches of 1979 and 1997 had become too dangerous for an antique creaking across the threshold of the Third Millennium. In a Europe and (soon) an archipelago regulated by proportional electoralism, the boxing-ring pantomime of 'first-past-the-post' was no longer easily sustainable. True, Blair's party had benefited from the old mechanisms in May 1997, but only in the wake of prolonged adversity, during which both the Left and the Centre of UK politics had been under-represented for nearly two decades. If the system was left intact, nothing could be surer than an eventual surge in the other direction. The instinct of Labourism (even the New sort) was that in Britain, and particularly in England, this reversal action would happen sooner rather than later, and was more liable to affect the Left than the Right.

The ancient theory had been that knock-outs ensured 'strong government'. This might have been all very well when the British Empire possessed a fundamentally strong ruling class—the old patriciate, culturally at one although ruling via different parties. But things had altered fundamentally. The combination of decline and Mrs Thatcher had ruined that elite. She started off her reign with a Cabinet of *grande*es and great acreage, and ended with one of journalists, estate-agents and sleaze-merchants. These put her out of business in 1990, then revealed themselves as incapable of setting up on their own account. So 'the system' now came to mean nothing but inebriate parliamentary majorities based on a minority of the votes cast, generating machismo-power, think-tank mania, mediaeval staggering fits like the Poll Tax, unrestrained petty bourgeois opportunism, and Sovereignty-delusions which the rest of the world now sniggered at.

New Labour was second-born into this post-patrician world. Which meant that its 1997 majority bore the wounds of four successive KOs, and the scars from a prolonged agony of internal modernization. Was it not due some compensation? That meant not just obtaining but staying in office. On his first day in power, Tony Blair launched an electoral campaign for the post-millennium ballots of 2002 and 2007. What was most 'new' about reformed Labourism was this hardened and re-oriented will—the determination to construct not merely a stand-in government, but a different and more stably based British elite order.

Rapid assemblage of new ruling class

This meant in turn that New Labourism, unlike the Thatcherites, was directly confronting what one must call the sociological problem of Great Britain *in extremis*. That is, how to replace the former ruling class by a plausible substitute. 'Britain', the empire's rump-state, can only be kept going by some new regulating and stabilizing cadre, one really capable of taking over from the gentlemen. Hostile critics claimed from the outset that Blairite 'radicalism' is mere conservatism; but actually it is more like *conservationism*. One should not judge it solely in terms of the former Left-Right spectrum. Seen rather in terms of curatorship, as a form of state survival-kit, it becomes more comprehensible. The Conservative first-born ('natural party of government', etc.) had been smashed into pitiful wreckage by the farce of Thatcher's last days and the May 1997 landslide. It would be in a life-raft for years to come. To the second-in-

line now fell the spoils, but also the onerous duty, of preserving and renewing one of history's outstanding polities—the oldest existing state in the world with any claim to modernity.

From 1997 onwards, much effort would be expended around a single question. Just what is Tony Blair's project?—asked many sceptical minds, particularly on the Left. The replies have been curiously sparse and unconvincing. But that may be because these inquirers have generally been searching for a socialism-substitute—some novel formula for social-policy redemption and advance. Accompanying this quest went a perfectly logical idea: the new government may as yet be professing no such formula, but at least some Cabinet craniums (preferably those in charge) must surely have one? Surely they must know what they're doing, if only they would tell us (and meanwhile, listen to our advice, engage in dialogue, etc.).

However, what if the logic itself were erroneous, in the sense of misdirected? What if, that is, there is neither a 'project' of that kind, nor the smallest chance of one being concealed in private ruminations anywhere round the Cabinet table? Would it not then follow that the only effective 'project' of end-Britain is *diminuendo* survival—transition from the management of decline into the management of disintegration, leading eventually to a suitable testament and funeral arrangements? Both countering economic decline ('Thatcherism') and re-engineering the political control-system ('Blairism') have naturally presented their aims as 'radical modernization'. But both these words have become terms of bluster, especially 'radical'. After the eighteen years of Mrs Thatcher and Blair's 1997 election campaign, it has come to signify little more than 'Have a nice day!' in the United States.

The problems addressed may indeed be 'radical' (basic, through-and-through, fundamental, etc.) but the available or short-term answers are really of a theme-park nature. There is no conceivable radical solution, in the sense so much bruited about by Mr Blair's thinkies and cultural gossellers. The unwritten goal of 'youthism' is death, even though—as in Mexican ritual commemorations—its processions and exhibitions may be filled with exuberant, even hysterical, life. The stage-management and scripting of the interval can (naturally) only be the work of the party in power. But the existential dilemma structuring its parade means that the party must be (or anyway try to be) the Party. That is, it must be a

class-substitute—a permanent-seeming elite which makes the end-time bearable. New Labour had to justify its ‘-ism’ by both being and showing that it was much more than a ‘movement’ in Tony Benn’s or Michael Foot’s sense—an ethical crusade occasionally permitted into office. It had now mutated into a replacement patriciate, the armature of a farther phase of British statehood, indelibly Great in both name and nature. While manoeuvring towards election-worthiness in the years 1994–97 it had been in reality transforming itself into such a cadre—an elite-surrogate. So, state-worthiness turned out to be the wingèd creature inside the dull chrysalis of Old Labour, still so fatally encrusted by Clause Four and the Socialist old-stagers of the historic Left.

As it showed at once, even before the liberation of 1 May, this creature flies by different rules from the mouldy night-moth of the 1970s and 1980s. Having lost its officer-class, the drifting multinational ship of state needed a new discipline and direction. The administration of these demanded an equivalent discipline and brio from the replacements. Their movement was assuming nothing less than the task of being Britain. Promotion to long-range heritage-governance was sustainable only via ostentatious rigidity and uniformity—through ‘discipline’ in an enhanced and visibly enforced mode, much greater than that usually associated with political parties (except in the former Communist countries). The result was that ‘totalitarianism’ of public relations and the predominance of censors and message-watchers which has been so much satirized by critics. Sometimes such Blairite symptoms have been explained in terms of malevolence, or the sheer egotism of a new Machiavellian Prince. But to some extent, surely, they can be seen as arising from quite objective constraints. Are they not also a response to the prolonged withdrawal symptoms of collapsing Britishness?

It is simply not possible to grow a new political elite overnight, or even in a few years. Revolution alone could accomplish that. Blairism is not revolutionary, and not even a revolution from above. It is the cautious avoidance of revolution-from-above by a whipped-on evolution-from-above (interspersed, of course, with colourful appeals to the populace). Under the conditions of Ukanian decay, evolutionary stability and sang-froid are demanded even of the undertakers. ‘Trust us!’ remains the law of surrogacy as it was that of empire—in some ways possibly even more so than during the preceding history of the British elite.

New ruling class considers options

The simulation of caste-power is a miserable affair, whose hollowness can only be concealed by a lordly affectation of utter unity and inflexible will. For some years Mrs Thatcher had provided a personal version of this, until it became insupportable to both her own party and the system. She had demonstrated both the force and the limitations of personal charisma as a compensation for decline. Hence a more systemic approach was now needed, which the corporate traditions of Labourism naturally strove to furnish (once Socialism had been purged). The traditional corpus of Labour offered a more collective ethos and organization to build on, in conjunction with the personal *rayonnement* of Blair.

However, that combination needed ideological reinforcement of the developing cadre-structure—'discipline', daily ideal methodone, unremitting morale-boosting—plus a minimal political plan for permanence. On this side, Thatcher had banked simply on prayer-book endorsement of the old Ukanian apparatus. Blair's intuition saw the folly of this, above all in the light of New Labour's inescapable commitments to the periphery. The sole advance-route possible was one of 'adaptation' to the new-old dilemma, through minimal remodelling of the Westminster machinery. In the House of Commons, this implied a coalition policy—the replacement (or modification) of simple-majority aberrancy via the construction of a more sustainable centre ground. The material was present, in the shape of the traditional centre-ground movement, the Liberal Democrats. The latter had been a permanent minority since the 1920s, but one with strong regional foundations as well as a powerful historical presence going back to the 1688 foundation of Britain. Traumatized like the Labour Party by the Thatcher-Major decades, the Liberal Democrats were also now more aligned with post-Socialist Labourism in ideological terms. This provided the conditions for a more enduring power-alliance—but only if the electoral system was reformed to give the Liberal Democrats a more reasonable representation in the Commons. For half a century they had been protesting against the unfairness of two partyism, a system which had condemned them to representative limbo.

Thus an empirical way forward presented itself to New Labour: minimal changes to the unwritten constitution which would simultaneously avoid the perils of Charter 88's projected shake-up and confirm them

in power as a long-term elite of redemption. Would they not eventually seem 'the natural party of government', the conservatives of a century to come? In the first year of Blair a Commission was set up to recommend the new election system, headed by former Labour Minister Roy Jenkins (now a Liberal Democrat, as well as a Lord). There was little doubt from the day of its inception that his committee's recommendation would be for a minimally proportional voting system. Nor that the New Labour majority would, after the humphing and haaa-ing time demanded by abandonment of any tri-secular ritual, endorse the changes. Then the public relations bravura associated with Blairism would surely win a referendum on the proposal?

Or would it? In the summer of 1998 some doubt must have developed over even these modest proposals. Lord Jenkins's suggestions would certainly be reasonable. But would they be Project-worthy, and safe? How else may one understand the strange affair of 'The Constitutional Declaration', and its even stranger aftermath? Dated 11 June, the full title of this statement was: 'Constitutional Declaration Agreed by the Government and the Liberal Democrat Party at a Meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee'. That committee was founded before the 1997 election, to discuss and coordinate Labour and Liberal Democratic policy on reforming government. After an age of total immobility on this plane, it had been felt that the main opposition parties should combine on a broader platform, and help win popular support (probably by referendum) for changes to the sacred device. But its fifth meeting was to be more than simple reaffirmation of previous joint-party aims. It was a declaration, presumably to the people, and presumably intended to affect them in some way. Also it was 'launched', not just put out: 'Blair and Ashdown Launch Constitutional Declaration'. As it happened, I was at around that time called on to present evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee, the one on Scottish Affairs. It was investigating future relations between Westminster and the new Edinburgh Parliament, and the new pronouncement seemed likely to have some bearing on its deliberations. I tried to get a copy.

This sounds simple. And so it should, surely, for the citizens to whom (in Declaration-speak) power is being brought day by day closer, and whose rights to Information (etc.) are now so regularly endorsed. In the week after 11 June 1998 I made three calls to the No. 10 Downing Street Press Office. The first surprise was how difficult it proved to

identify just which Declaration/Appeal/Statement was being requested. On each occasion the assumption at the other end was that callers would want copies of Chancellor Gordon Brown's announcement about privatization—'launched' at the same moment. 'Constitutional declaration? Ah . . . just a minute please' was each time followed by a pause, and on one occasion by: 'Oh . . . you mean the *Party* declaration . . . got you, right!' There followed the standard name-and-address ritual, plus assurance it would be in the post. But a week later, nothing had come in the post.

In one of the few press comments on the Constitutional Declaration, Matthew D'Ancona suggested in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 14 June that its timing was no accident: 'On an ordinary day the long-planned Blair-Ashdown statement—a poorly-written pledge to 'put power closer to the people'—would have been subjected to much sterner scrutiny. In practice, it was all but forgotten in the excitement surrounding the Chancellor's auction of state assets.' 'The last thing we want at the moment is a big debate about the constitution', one Minister had told him. The Declaration was in truth a consoling gesture towards the Liberal Democrats, who had begun to suffer from growing suspicion about the government's reforming intentions. It was the sort of thing which would once have crept out of 'smoke-filled rooms', rather than been launched—a party stand-off, as it were, curiously disguised as a ringing *pronunciamento* to the farthest corners of the land.

Still, D'Ancona's comments made me yet more anxious to see the document. I phoned again, carefully repressing any hint of outraged citizenship. The Select Committee was meeting the next day, so time was short. Would it not be possible for Downing Street to deliver a copy of the Declaration to the Houses of Parliament, where I could pick it up by hand? 'Ah, well, I suppose so . . .' came the answer, 'but I don't think that's a good idea. No. Things just tend to get lost down there. Wait a minute . . .' Out-of-earshot confabulation followed, and then: 'Tell you what. Just go to the police box at the Downing Street gates tomorrow morning on your way to the Commons. We'll make sure it's waiting for you.' And so it came about that on a fine June morning, strolling down Whitehall to my seat of government, I turned into Downing Street for guidance. Two iconic policemen were indeed there, in shirtsleeves, and carefully inscribed the request in a large notebook. But they had no Declaration. 'Just hang on there, Sir!' said one of

the officers, picking up the phone. Ten minutes went by. And then at last a lady secretary emerged out of the famous glossy black door carrying a large brown envelope. She hastened up to the police cabin. The Constitutional Declaration was mine. Ten minutes remained to read it before the Committee was due to convene.

They were more than enough. Even allowing for the five-minute walk to Parliament Square, seconds sufficed for a three-page document of such nerve-stunning banality. D'Ancona had been *exaggerating*: the pledge was not 'written' at all, but ground out of a word-processor programmed entirely with *exhumed* clichés and rubber-stamp *exhortations*. At the end came the 'Declaration': 'We ask for the support of the British people in putting power where it belongs, in their hands'. But what the Declaration meant was something like this: the gladsome torrent of constitutional modernization has subsided into a stagnant puddle in which, none the less, appearances have to be kept up.

Options have to be kept open; but only just. Lord Jenkins's Report was always likely to be 'accepted'; but once accepted, it was also at once perceived as likely to benefit from some farther years of contemplation and reconsideration. 'Years'—or even parliamentary sessions? Two months later it was repeatedly rumoured that the changes, and the referendum, would be put off until after the next General Election. By September, we find Matthew D'Ancona noting how opposition has mounted to the reform within Blair's own party, while the experience of power has simultaneously diminished the enthusiasm of its modernizers. Hence the most probable compromise may 'postpone the changes until, at the earliest, the election after next' (that is, until 2006 or 2007). He may have been *exaggerating* again. The likely timetables cited after publication of the Jenkins document were that it might be realizable *in eight years or so*. On the other hand, one never knew. All things considered (Boundary Commission changes, elections) eleven years might be a more realistic prospect. Thus old-fashioned reform had been triumphantly replaced by virtual reform, a mantle for inertia and will-lessness. Robert Musil would have been delighted by such ingenious procrastination, the gymnastics of sincere deceit. He never invented anything half as Byzantine.

Another of the truisms in the 11 June Declaration does admit: 'Constitutional change requires the widest possible consensus, and that

will take time to deliver in full . . .' But more significant (especially for Liberal Democrats) was the fact that it was not *against* anything. It was not (for instance) opposed to time-wasting, unnecessary delay, or futile postponement in the hope that the issue itself would somehow vanish from human ken. No, for collaborators of the new regime the only real enemy loitering out there is separatism. As Peter MacMahon pointed out in *The Scotsman*, one finds the document's solitary tooth on page one. It turns out to be sunk into Plaid Cymru and the SNP—those wreckers, out to destroy the old thing, even before it has a chance to get itself modernized. Years or even decades are fine for reforming (or perhaps after all, not reforming) things British. But what counts now is to stop the separatist scoundrels in their tracks. Among all the other bromides, a faint whiff of Third Way chloroform also arises from this test: 'This is the new politics: between an old-fashioned centralized state and disintegration. . .'

The fate of Lordship

Secondly there is the problem of aristocracy. Reform of the UK's second chamber was needed to underwrite the new class's tenser and more focused authority. When Blair came into office he and his nation were still confronting a genuinely astonishing possibility: that the globe's 'oldest democracy', 'Mother of Parliaments' (etc.) might soon be embarking upon the Third Millennium AD with a still-functioning hereditary system. In the nineteenth century Radicals had sometimes made tactical pacts with the nobility, usually against what are now called 'market forces'. But in the twenty-first century? Reborn as 'youthism', could House of Commons 'radicalism' really cut some unprecedented deal with bloodline voting and genetic entitlement? Under Thatcher's economic version of the radical credo, Lordship had counted for little. Her political philistinism occluded the anomaly, assisted by the crude bloodline fact that most Lords were Conservatives, and did whatever the government told them between 1979 and 1997.

Clearly this would change. But there was also the question of status and ideal appearance—much more significant for a regime forced forward on to a terrain of political salience and constitutional adjustments. It would simply be ridiculous for any new-style hegemony to try and coexist with the world's outstanding reliquary of feudalism. The national theme-park implications would be intolerable. However—as with the electoral

reform quandary—certain features of the ancient regime's prodigious accumulation of bric-à-brac helped in the formulation of a 'compromise'. In the course of the previous half-century pseudo-Lordship had been added on to the real bedline product. Each Honours List (New Year and Midsummer) now announced a number of 'Life Peers'—non-hereditary baronages granted solely for the individual's lifespan. These are like non-elective Senatorships, terminable only by decease. Nomination is via a committee system concerned both with 'proper' party representation (mostly rewarding veteran MPs) and with supposed civic or social merit—'outstanding achievement', preferably in some politically harmless arena. Life Peerages carry the same voting rights as those inherited from the Norman Conquest, but are still far fewer in number. The rise in sinecure and patronage since Harold Wilson's (subsequently Lord Wilson's) period of office has not sufficiently outpaced the breeding power of lineage.

The House of Lords is these days restricted to censure and recommendations on the legislation passed by the 'Lower Chamber' (as it is still called). Since the latter has now appropriated United Kingdom sovereignty, or crown-power, a convention had since World War One ensured that the Upper Chamber would never finally refuse to pass Commons laws. However, they could still delay legislation as well as query it, and sometimes spoke of disregarding the gentleman's convention and reverting to earlier practice. One such episode had left a particularly deep mark on the consciousness of both the Labour Party and the general public. In 1988 the Life Peers who mostly attend to the business of today's House of Lords had become alarmed by Mrs Thatcher's Poll Tax. Even time-serving has-beens could sense the likelihood of mutiny over this. Thus an alliance of pseudo-feudal off-scourings with popular resentment was briefly threatened, which might have rejected the infamous law. It was to prevent this that the true-Brit Peerage was called forth from its hinterlands to ensure passage of the measure.

What ensued was unforgettable. Even a Man quite Without Qualities could not have failed to be impressed. It was a fully Ethiopian spectacle worthy of some Benjamin Disraeli novel. Bentleys and ambulances laden with Thatcher-worshippers converged upon St Stephen's Palace from every decayed estate in the kingdom, so that the undead might vote through the century's most unspeakably stupid legislation. A kind of hole was burned into the climate of opinion by the event, which still left

strong traces a decade later. That episode alone (one might have thought) should have been enough to guarantee straightforward and instant abolition of this institution by any government with the faintest claim to being 'radical' in any older and more honourable sense.

Not, however, by a government whose pretensions were to virtual radicalism alone. Or (more precisely) to virtuality fused with profound caution and a mounting sense of stately duty. The Blairites decided to abolish hereditary-right voting, while retaining the institution. Instead of moving over to an elected Senate in the classical pattern, the life-peer principle was to be evolved farther. These Lords-for-a-day would become, in effect, like a working extension of the monarchy—a ceremonial political guard-room, permitted to tut-tut about legislation and counsel to their heart's content, but without even vestigial powers of interference.

Governments would in this way retain the valuable authority of seniority-reward and status-endowment, plus that sense of stable continuity which even grotesque traditions are keen to foster—the feeling of social life going on, unanxious and 'time-honoured'. 'Time-honoured' is an important concept—not on any account to be confused with 'time-worn', 'exhausted' or 'as-good-as-dead'. Nor should the uniforms, furniture and wigs be overlooked. While absurd in themselves, they have never functioned 'in themselves': they exist invariably in an intimate alliance with quite interesting and gossip-worthy matters—like who gets what, why, in recompense for which favour or in compensation for which injury or failure? This sort of thing is less awesome than descent from Normans and Plantagenets, but also more interesting and more appropriate to a pot-noodle regime seeking (against obvious odds) to evolve a new courtly style of its own.

In late July 1998, one of the most 'sparkling' representatives of Labour Newness was appointed to superintend Lords reform: Baroness Jay. I cite the term 'sparkling' simply because it was employed in all newspaper accounts of the event. The *Independent on Sunday* of 2 August 1998 (for example) described her promotion under the headline: 'How Labour aristocrat Jay walked effortlessly to the top'. Margaret Jay happens to be the daughter of ex-Premier James (now Lord) Callaghan, and was formerly married to journalist and one-time diplomat Peter Jay, son of another Labour Ministerial eminence, Douglas Jay. The Baroness had 'perfect credentials for the job', and was 'known for her formidable talent

for networking . . . as a key member of the Prime Minister's trusted inner circle'. Another Baroness is quoted as declaring: 'Margaret Jay is the ideal person to quell any discord in the House of Lords over Labour reform . . . She is a discreet gossip, and not in the least bit pompous.' Much of the rest of the article is devoted to amplifying this point. As was invariably said in the past of all genuine blue-bloods (including Queen Elizabeth II) Mrs Jay turns out to be full of human warmth, has a sense of humour, and will have time left over to cook for you even when terribly busy. The new life-peer ruling class is surprisingly like the old.

I merely quote this account without elaboration, lest any reader should think that elements of misplaced irony may have intruded upon some of my earlier arguments. The *Independent on Sunday* story was accompanied, incidentally, by a preposterous diagram of the new elite 'network' around Mrs Jay, which apparently extends from Cherie Blair to Meryl Streep, via the BBC's John Birt, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, the Seventh Duke of Marlborough, Barry Humphries, Anna Ford and Sir Stephen Spender—'Poet, now deceased'. In the contemplation of Blairism, no irony can be misplaced and satire grows daily more redundant. A Musil of today's United Kingdom would have to pit himself against a self-satire now routinely built into the system, and unavoidably replicated in even the most straightforward or pedestrian accounts of it.

Following abolition of the shameful body, a further logical move might have been to replace Lordship with regional or national representation—that is, with a second chamber on German or Spanish lines, in which the different populations and territories of the UK could voice distinct opinions and interests. After devolution one might have thought in fact the case for such a body was stronger. The very existence of assemblies in Wales, Scotland and Ulster will in any case generate demand for some new representation at the centre. Would it not be better to give such voices formal status within the renewed framework of state?

But of course this cannot be, for reasons already noted. Such logic would still be suicidal for Britain, and no smooth talk of federalism, or even of asymmetrical pseudo- or semi-federalism, will make any difference to this fact. The English would have to find representation in such a body, surely. And there is no obvious way that could happen without their being automatically over-represented. The potential conflicts of a non-unitary state, unregulated by a new constitution, could not really be

arranged by a crypto-lordly surrogate for such a statute and law. Far safer, therefore, to stick to pseudo-nobility and Mrs Jay's 'networking'. The termination of mere Inheritance is now required in order to safeguard and rebuild Heritage. It is time bloodline gave way to focus group. Fibreglass Lords and Ladies (suitably extended in terms of recruitment) will provide a stronger buttress for the still-crystallizing new elite. The latter's interests now require that Middle England be appeased and comforted on this important level of the old imagined community—not stirred up and worried by new and quite needless challenges.³

A prophet ignored

Barnett's *This Time* had the misfortune to be proposing the non-available answer: revolution. Its whole tone was damnably and deliberately un-British, even though—as the author patiently explains a number of times—he is actually trying to save Britain in a more serious sense, by acting pre-emptively against threats of secessionist or exclusionary nationalism. Such a noble wish still leaves out something indispensable. To be recast in twenty-first century constitutional mode, Britain must first be saved from the British. Unfortunately, Blairism is at bottom last-ditch Britishness, and this turning was rapidly defining itself during the very months when Barnett's clarion call was making its way through the presses. By the time it was published, the current of renovation had already clearly gone into contraflow.

During the decades of the Right, when Charter 88 got going, radicalizing Britain had seemed to mean saving Ukania from demented economists, fake Americanizers and astrological misreadings of Adam Smith. After May 1997, its sense abruptly shifted: Britain had now to be saved by the Left. But no longer by the stalwart old Left, still vaguely comparable to the Austrian Social Democrats—patrician to the heart, liberal-impe-

³ The worst fears of critics were to be boundlessly exceeded by what surfaced in early 2000: an A5 'summary' of the Royal Commission's report ('A House for the Future', 99-5271/0001/D160; cd-rom attached). As if in deliberate mimicry of the contents, the cover shows ghostly images of the Britannic landmass fading away into an ochreous middle distance. The proposal is for an appointee body selected by other appointees, plus an unspeakably bathetic 'regional' component elected through some 'model' yet to be decided. The spirit of the whole collapsed soufflé is best conveyed by Recommendation 128 (Chapter 18, p. 27): 'The question of the name of the second chamber and the titles of its members should be left to evolve ...'

rial, Protestant, morality-encrusted. Such had been the party of Attlee, Stafford Cripps, Lord Callaghan and (ultimately) of John Smith. But that lay now in the grave alongside these gentlemen.

In its place there stood general disorientation in search of legitimacy. The new Blairite 'Left' remained so by historic descent and affiliation, and yet had cast aside almost everything related to previous British left-wing ideology, in order to gain power. There was no successor ideology to 'British Socialism'. No one could have accomplished such a feat in the short time following John Smith's death in 1994—least of all in a world where State Socialism was still in accelerating and general retreat. Thus the idea-free inheritor could only be a vanguard of hungry but somewhat empty 'modernizers' . . . still in search of their own blueprint of modernity. It stood condemned to compose such 'modernity' on the hoof. Many of its policies were simply appropriated from the earlier, popular phase of Thatcherism—lessons wisely if ungratefully learnt, and accompanied by the firm intention of never returning to Old-Left corporatism and dependency. But this alone would never a New Age make. A stronger display-identity was needed: hence the 'virtual revolution', and the cacophony of polyhedrons and post-modern circus-acts—the unconscious mimicry of Britain's great Central European predecessor.

Even in decline, however, a social and state fabric remains far stronger than those who would change it by incantation. It is likely to reimpose itself, or most of itself. This is exactly what Anthony Barnett sensed might happen, if the will faltered, and what he was publishing his eloquent sermon against. The one guarantee against such underlying continuity (he maintained) was a new state, based upon a new constitution; which entailed, for a time, an absolute priority of constitutional over other issues; which implied a government that would assert this priority over the economic and social-policy questions customarily central to British politics; which demanded that reform be made the sort of popular-national cause that Charter 88 had fought for.

These imperatives hang together. But if they failed to hang together, he could see they might all be defeated separately. And in such a defeat, even the positive piecemeal reforms applauded in the pages of *This Time*—devolution, Ireland, electoral reform, the opening to Europe, the Lords—would end up as survival-rafts rather than new departures. The British 'constitutional revolution' had to cohere; the trouble is that the

ancien régime coheres as well, even after the battering it took during the 1980s, even so close to its quietus.

The collapse of party-political Conservatism in 1997 meant there was little for it to cling to but the new raw would-be elite. Which meant that in a quite novel sense (as we have seen) the way was open for New Labourism to at least temporarily become 'Britain'—that is, a replacement for the ruling class broken and demoralized by the grim abrasion and failures of the two decades since the late seventies. Much in the regimentation and rigidity of New Labour may have from the start responded to this challenge. Was its famous mobilization of the post-1994 period just to win an election? Or was it (as I have argued) about power in a much profounder, more salvationist sense—the stiffening of a now struggling collective instinct to keep the British polity going? Would 'modernization' come to mean basic survival, rather than the creative choice of futures which so much future-oriented rhetoric suggests?

The subsequent fate of Barnett's polemic surely supports a gloomier interpretation of events. His book fell straight into a black hole of indifference bordering on hostility. Its assumption had been a continuing, even a rising, tide of support for planned central change—for constitutionalism as the coherent and determined *raison d'être* of the new power. But what the book's reception showed was the almost total absence of such a tide. Far from captaining the onward momentum, Charter 88 was marginalized into a vaguely supporting role, a gadfly to the Left. Critics on the conventional Left denounced the government's failure or capitulation on social or economic matters, and particularly on welfare. But their emphasis was already the contrary of Barnett's. Governmental faltering over constitutional issues came to be perceived as secondary—even forgivable. What was a written constitution, after all, compared to the past achievements of Liberal-Left Britain or the grim necessities of welfare shrinkage and an underclass being attacked from above?

Thus in the early-Blairite cultural atmosphere there was a deadly mixture of toxic influences, all already hostile to plain Paineite radicalism. On one hand a wing of nostalgics, voicing elegiac regret for past Socialist achievement, which they considered betrayed by the new administration. But their factional answer was self-evidently useless: resuscitation of the world now lost, or else invention of a new-model doctrine which could hardly help smelling and feeling awfully like the old one. Or,

on the other hand, there was public-relations postmodernism: smart devices and conceptual ways around 'outmoded' problems or attitudes. The latter could, all too easily, be made to include dreary old nation-state constitutionalism. If everything solid is melting into the air in that sense, why bother trying to pin it down again into an old-fangled constitution?

The prophetic admonition of *This Time* fell exactly between these current streams of thought. It clearly despised the tomb-cults of nostalgic Leftism, yet insisted that real novelty depended upon pushing through a few plain-talking, 'old-fashioned' reforms—the sort eschewed historically by the Britishness of both Left and Right. As if by slide-rule design, therefore, Barnett managed to utter what almost nobody at that moment of time wanted to hear. The most significant political diagnosis of Ukania's *fin de siècle* passed practically unnoticed amid the court gossip, the hand-wringing of defunct Socialism, and the deranged séance-mentality of William Hague's refugee Toryism.

One gets the sense from reading *This Time* that it will be small consolation to the author to have his prophecies fulfilled. While exhorting a new regime to get it right, he could not help cataloguing the ways it could go wrong. As he was writing, those ways piled up around him. By December 1997, when the book appeared, they loomed over him: the spectre of a less-than-half revolution, already contracting into its own compromises and conceits. Thatcher also had brought about a less-than-half redemption, which had ruined both her and her party. But this was even more serious. If, as I have argued, 'Blairism' is really a last-ditch attempt at maintaining the United Kingdom by the formation of a pot-noodle ruling class, then nothing much can be visible beyond it. In different ways the nations of the old composite state are likely to end by throwing it off; and afterwards, they will evolve into differing selves—the identities for so long occluded by the superimposition of Britishness. The fall from such an apotheosis can only be into depths as yet unlumbed. Whether or not the great renewal prospected in *This Time* was possible, its failure must leave us 'after Britain', in a genuinely post-imperial condition.

'Corporate populism'

In the summer of 1998 Blair's government submitted an *Annual Report* to the people. The business-style title was deliberate. It began with a 'ten-point contract', and a full page portrait of the Leader in his boardroom (the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street). 'Changing a government is like sweeping away the entire senior management of a company,' he announced. In spite of critics saying 'this Government is more concerned with style than substance', he insisted it had made a good start. To underline boardroom confidence the *Annual Report* was full of full-colour illustrations of customers, with improbable messages scrawled over them—for example, a girl sitting in front of the Bank of England saying: 'I am pleased with changes that have been made and am looking forward to the improvements in the transport system.'

Barnett followed up *This Time* with an incisive account of the *Report's* assumptions. Unable to implement a new conception of the state, Blairism had defaulted to the model of a business company. Great Britain had in all earnest become what journalists had so often dubbed it in the past—Great Britain plc, 'the image of agency provided by big companies'. So socialism had lapsed finally into 'corporate populism'. This is neither ancient subjecthood nor modern constitutional citizenship. It is more like a weak identity-hybrid, at a curious tangent to both. Voters are seen as customers (like the girl at the Bank of England), while the Party Executive 'manages party, cabinet and civil service as if they were parts of a single giant company whose aim is to persuade voters that they are happy customers who want to return Labour to office.'

This is certainly better than mere deference. After all, customers are expected to object and criticize a bit (even if most don't, most of the time). But then, by taking their protests into account, the management normally expects to reinforce its own market share. It is 'the modernization of subjecthood', rather than a replacement for it. The sovereign crown gives way to the Managing Director and his unanimous executive board, devoted at once to profitability and (again in the *Annual Report* language) to Britain 'regaining its pride and ambition, at home and abroad' and telling the right story at all times: 'we are a great nation, filled with creative, innovative, compassionate people.' A great nation, but much more emphatically a capitalist one. Where the Poll Tax had failed, an *Annual Report* now appeared to be signalling success.

So here was the economic vector of archaism, seriously at work. Mrs Thatcher's 'economic revolution' was still advancing, and no longer beneath the level of the state. Thanks to the English economy's traditional strength—the global force of the City of London and finance capital—economic modernization was still possible, and still comparatively effective. Manufacturing modernization was far less attainable, and in fact had been largely abandoned under Thatcher. But the remainder was capable of taking over the ideological garb of statehood at least for a time—a 'business' nation if no longer an industrial one, appealing to a business-minded folk. Cost-effective-conscious to the core, New-Labour Britishers no longer needed *un plébiscite de tous les jours*, Ernest Renan's formula for civic nationalism—daily reaffirmation of the French, American or other dream through moments of pride and aspiration. Now a daily visit to the supermarket would do just as well, coupled with reminders of sterling's strength and the foreign conquests of our 'world-class' business. Blair was right: style is substance, it sells things in the global supermarket and guarantees cybernetic prosperity. This is also why the Millennium Dome is identified with the national interest.

'Corporate populism' is absolute philistinism. Another reason for the business class to support New Labour, of course, but one which seems inseparable from a frightful risk. Its apparatus of consumers and 'stakeholders' mimics democracy, substituting brand loyalty and ordinariness for hope and glory. This can seem possible, even attractive, *while things go well* in the narrowly economic terms to which the creed awards priority. Even then there may be a resentful underclass that has no stake, and public sector or non-commercial enterprises which fall behind; but rapid growth for the majority cushions and conceals these downsides. When the growth momentum ceases, however, such compensatory effects are likely to vanish totally.

People will then have to fall back on the non-corporate, less than cost-effective nation—on a national community and state as Renan (and so many others) have perceived them. That is, on communal faith and justice, the extended family of egalitarian dreams. Everyone knows that a corporation will not 'support' customers in any comparable sense, beyond the limits of profitability; but everyone feels that is *exactly* what a nation should do. Brand-loyalty is precisely *not* 'belonging' in the more visceral sense associated with national identity. Indeed it easily becomes the opposite of belonging: sell-out, Devil take the hindmost, moving on

(or out) to maintain profitability. Since the national factor cannot really be costed, it is easily caricatured as a question of soulful romanticism or delusion. However, such commonsense is itself philistine. It fails to recognize something crucial. When Marks and Spencer betrays its customers the result is an annoyance; for a nation-state to let its citizens down can be a question of life or death, and not in wartime alone.

Peoples have not 'imagined' such communities by chance, or out of irrational impulses from the soul. 'Identities' are not aesthetic choices but ways of existing, or of trying to exist better. This is the 'nation' which has counted in modern, nationalist times, and it is not very like the portraits in Blair's *Annual Report*. The national-popular has generally been not-so-great, hard done by, struggling, threatened, at war, filled with not always 'creative' and sometimes angry people who think they can't afford so much compassion, and look around for redemptive leadership. They turn to the nation of war memorials, oaths, poetry, sacrifice and mythic blood. It is the coiner of the phrase 'imagined community', Benedict Anderson, who has himself underlined the contrast between these two worlds in a recent essay, 'The Goodness of Nations'. Democracies must feel themselves more than the data of annual reports, even euphoric ones. He uses an odd selection of things to make the point—the war memorial at New Haven, Connecticut; an episode of *The Simpsons*; the North Indian 'celibacy movement'—but since he wrote, post-1997 Britain may already have supplied a more telling one.

It lay in the contrast mentioned earlier, between the popular reaction to the death of the Princess of Wales and New Labour's response—the reaction typified, about a year later, by this *Annual Report*. In late August to September 1997 the living (in Anderson's terminology) were in the streets and trying, however sentimentally and confusedly, to 'secure the Rightness of the country' and reorient it away from the shame of a rotten decade. A year later, they had become ridiculous illustrations in a kind of annual sales report. Populism had been recuperated and rendered respectable, and also given this small-minded and neo-liberal cast. Somehow business as usual had resumed, and normalcy been enhanced as never before, carrying forward much of Mrs Thatcher's *Geist* but with the added panache and excitement of a new sales drive. 'Britain' was buzzing once more, but the sound was a reassuring one: safety-first *redressement* rather than the unsettling music of republican constitutionalism.

'England-and-...'

Just how safe the *Annual Report* country is meant to become was convincingly shown in early 1999. Although Scotland is the biggest problem for Blairland, Wales remains its closest neighbour. As well as the physical intimacy of a long north-south marchland, the two countries were historically united by early conquest and absorption. In the modern era that union of unequals has normally been awarded a strange name of its own, which appears in all legal documents where it is necessary to treat Scotland, Northern Ireland or other dependencies separately: 'England-and-Wales'. The term conveys a bare modicum of recognition with an associated stress on functional unity. Whatever gestures may be needed elsewhere, here we have two who are truly as one.

The post-imperial return of Wales has therefore been very distinct from that of Scotland. It has resembled much more closely the typical ethno-linguistic trajectory of repressed nationhood—cultural mobilization directed towards nation-building and the eventual formation of a state. After Blair's electoral victory of 1997 a first Welsh Parliament was part of the pay-off. This was conceived quite differently from the Edinburgh one—as a 'first-installment', non-legislative body with executive control over the existing Welsh Office budget but otherwise limited to debating and offering advice. When it came to power, the Cardiff 'National Assembly' members were to be consumers indeed. In the Year 2000 *Annual Report* they will no doubt have their own colour-spread and appropriate pseudo-critique, most likely along the lines of—'So far so good in Wales, but give us more . . .' (something or other . . . roads; language facilities; Life Peers).

But six months before the National Assembly met, the New England-and-Wales was already in trouble. The Assembly was conceived as a voice. But the trouble with allowing a national voice to speak up is that it may say something. Alas, speech can indeed be a form of action. It may even say (do) something disagreeable or (as in this case) something vexingly Welsh. Blair's reading of the old Austro-Marxist runes made cultural Welshness a blessing, naturally. But only provided it did not impinge upon the deeper peace signalled by the 'and' of England-and-Wales, whereby England will go on conducting the orchestra to which choir and harp would continue to make their traditional contribution.

In 1997 and early 1998 the Welsh Assembly plan was guided by the Welsh Secretary of State (and leader of the Welsh Labour Party) Ron Davies. He led the successful cross-party campaign for a 'Yes' vote which reversed the decision of a previous referendum in 1979. Critics commented on the narrowness of the victory, compared to Scotland, but usually overlooked the huge shift in opinion it represented. Mr Davies himself never made this mistake. He frequently emphasized the continuing trend, as distinct from the arrangements of any one moment. 'Devolution is a process, not an event,' was his way of putting this. Such an attitude might in time have boded ill for London but we shall never know, for Davies was prematurely struck down in the summer of 1998. It was not a London omnibus or a fatal illness that did for him, but scandal. The after-effects of an ill-understood fracas on Clapham Common forced his resignation as government minister, party leader—and almost certainly first Prime Minister of the new Assembly in 1999. A successor had unexpectedly to be elected. And this accident of history cast a revealing light on how devolution was now regarded at Westminster.

For Blair and his Cabinet, devolution is emphatically an event, not a process. Nothing could have been done about Ron Davies. He came with the territory and had been responsible for the referendum success. But after his disgrace they were determined no other process-merchant would take his place: only the safest and most pliable of leaders would do—preferably someone impeccably British, and 'not too keen' on the whole autonomy project. They had already had to change the British Constitution in Northern Ireland for the sake of a peace 'process', and were extremely disinclined to do so again to placate a new form of local government in England's oldest internal colony. A line had now to be drawn.

Once more, the actual phenomenon of Blairism at work preempts any conceivable satire. Suppose a hostile Tory commentator had written something like this, for example: 'Power-freak Blair, like the tinpot dictator he actually is, has chosen the most notoriously supine, cardboard figure in the Welsh Party to do his bidding, using every rotten trick in the old Party rulebook to get his own way while continuing to rant about reform and third-way democracy—just the way Eastern Europe used to be!' He would, alas, only have been saying in tabloid-speak what every other journalist was then to write in his or her own fashion. In *The Times* William Rees-Mogg put it this way:

Wales has been insulted . . . by the way in which the choice of Leader for the Assembly has been manipulated. When Tony Blair was chosen as Leader of the Labour Party, the trade union section of the electoral college operated 'one man, one vote'. When Alun Michael was chosen Labour Leader for Wales, the majority of the trade unions returned to the old block vote principle. Three trade union leaders were sufficient to cast the votes which gave Alun Michael his victory.

Thus in the end a resounding majority of actual Welsh members voted for Rhodri Morgan, a well-educated dissident with trouble written all over him; and Mr Michael was wheeled on to centre-stage by traditional Old Corruption, amid a tropical downpour of Radical and New-Life protestations. As Rees-Mogg concluded, a great number of those whose vote was scorned in this way were likely to think 'devolution to Wales is a sham, a cover for the maintenance of English supremacy, enforced by the Blairite rigging of the leadership election', and turn to Plaid Cymru. Six months later, at the first elections, they did so turn.

It was not as if the government's attitude was confined to Wales. Although less crassly, analogous pressures were being applied in Scotland as well, and also in London, around the selection of Labour's candidate for the new Mayor. At the same time, a BBC *Panorama* documentary was broadcast on just this wider theme, and gave a convincing picture of a regime backpedalling furiously to undo, or at least restrain, some of the awkward political consequences of devolution. A general counter-revolution was under way designed to preserve 'England-and-. . .' everywhere else too, in approximately their traditional roles within the mystery play of Britishness. Too many voters had been taken in, concluded Rees-Mogg. They had thought the rhetoric was authentic and 'believed that the three 'D' words—Devolution, Diversity and Democracy—meant something, were more than mere slogans . . . Neither in Wales, Scotland nor in London does that now appear to be true.' Peter Preston arrived at a similar verdict in the same day's *Guardian*: 'The troubles that begin to flow in irksome abundance—resurgent Scots Nationalists, roaring Rhodri, taunting Ken—are not, it is becoming clear, isolated events. They are part of a structure. They won't go away.'

England's England

The 'structure' Preston complains of is 'Britain' or, more accurately, England's Britain. Unshed save in emptily radical terms, this armature of fate was bound to reassert itself after the shocks of 1997. The core of the problem is that behind England's Britain there lies England's England, the country which has not merely 'not spoken yet' but, in effect, refrained from speaking because a British-imperial class and ethos have been in possession for so long of its vocal cords. A class has spoken for it. This is the evident sense in which England has been *even more* affected and deformed by imperial globalization than other parts of the archipelago.

What might come 'after England'? In Julian Barnes's fantasy novel *England, England* the whole sclerotic culture is transplanted in theme-park form to the Isle of Wight. Sir Jack Pitman, a business and media tycoon reminiscent of Robert Maxwell, 'reconstructs' Englishness on the island, complete with a downsized Westminster, Windsor, Manchester United, White Cliffs, Imperialism, Harrods, whingeing, etc. Invented tradition is everywhere, like 'the old English custom of downing a pint of Old Skullsplitter with a twiglet up each nostril'. 'We are not talking heritage centre,' he rumbles, 'we are offering *the thing itself*.' This project is disastrously successful, and declares independence as a microstate of truly corporate populism. Meanwhile, the real 'real England', a mainland thus deprived of its essence, sinks slowly backwards into time. 'Anglia' takes over from Britain. 'Quaintness, diminution, failure' create a different landscape, possessed by a new-old innocence and goodness:

Chemicals drained from the land, the colours grew gentler, and the light untainted; the moon, with less competition, now rose more dominantly. In the enlarged countryside, wildlife bred freely. Hares multiplied; deer and boar were released into the woods from game farms; the urban fox returned to a healthier diet of bloodied, pulsing flesh. Common land was re-established; fields and farms grew smaller; hedgerows were replanted.

Martha Cochrane, who has abandoned Isle-of-Wight England for this arcadia, asks herself 'if a nation could reverse its course and its habits', but of course the answer is her own life in this country isolated from Europe and the world, in which items are again 'sold by the hundred-weight, stone and pound for amounts expressed in pounds, shillings

and pence', where 'four-lane motorways peter out into woodland, with a gypsy caravan titupping over the lurched, volcanic tarmac', and thunder has regained its divinity.

In *This Time* Anthony Barnett acknowledged the necessity of English reaffirmation as part of the new constitutional process. It has to be more than the rebranding advocated by Mark Leonard's Demos pamphlet *Britain*TM (1997), which would amount to acquiescing in Jack Pitman's futurescape. Such modernization of the theme park won't do, even given the *rayonnement* of the Millennium Dome. Nor is 'mongrelization' a solution—that is, a self-conscious embracing of multicultural diversity in preference to ethnic majority nativism. That was argued for in Philip Dodd's *The Battle Over Britain* (1996), where ethnic minorities and regional identities capture the dissolved essence of the nation and remanifest it as an inherently variegated democracy. But such a 'preference' has to be expressed. How can it be shown, without a constitutional mode of expression, and a prior redefinition of sovereignty? Democracy is not popular instinct or the simple prevalence of a majority: it is a constitution, or nothing. If this is not put first, then it will come last—and quite possibly too late.

In *The Times* of 12 February 1998 (coinciding with the devolutionary debacle in Wales) Political Editor Philip Webster announced something else. It was like a cloud the size of man's hand, in a diminutive box on page ten. But behind lies a great storm, gathering below the horizon: 'Beckett to give England a Voice'. Mrs Beckett's ministerial plan is to 'give England a distinct voice in Parliament after Scottish and Welsh devolution' by setting up a committee of English MPs. Although humbly named the 'Standing Committee on Regional Affairs', there is no one in Scotland, Wales or Ireland who will be deceived for a second by this: it would be the *de facto* English Parliament, convened on its own for the first time since 1546 (when Wales was formally incorporated). Since no provision was made for the majority in Blair's radical project, it will be forced to make its own, erupting bit by bit, using disguise and alias, proceeding through an obstacle course of tactical accidents and afterthoughts. The Government's 'Modernization Select Committee' was supposed to agree Mrs Beckett's scheme and (the report concluded) 'will almost certainly back the idea'.

Whether it does or not, evolution in that sense is unavoidable. On that plane, Tam Dalyell's old 'West Lothian Question' was certainly not mistaken, even if he himself drew so many mistaken conclusions from it. The impact of Scottish and Welsh self-government upon the former constitution of the United Kingdom is bound to be significant. The Parliamentary elite will be disrupted in its business, even if the majority of voters remains indifferent. A disruption of the establishment will be translated into a concern, even a scandal, for the masses. All issues will be seen as aggravated, if not provoked, by ill-considered changes on the periphery. Since these cannot be undone, the centre itself will have to act, and affirm its own rights. The Standing Committee of English Members will be called upon to speak, and not in a hushed Select-Committee monotone. It will speak for England, the people and nation, and its very informality—its air of having arisen from the regional ranks—may bestow upon the body a spontaneous, even revolutionary appearance: 'It's time someone spoke out!'—and stopped 'them' having things all their own way.

Populism like this finds its own way to nationalism, and there is nothing new or inherently harmful in that. However, it would have been better to plan for it, by putting a coherent, overall constitutional change first, rather than leaving it in this way to the uncertain and possibly uncontrollable last. An intelligible *Grundgesetz* would at least have paved part of the way towards equality of representation and treatment. In Austria-Hungary the Germans may not have wanted such equality, but at least they had the choice: nobody pretended they were not there, or 'took them for granted' in that curious sense which has dogged Englishness throughout the long decline of Britain. It is from this occlusion that the dominant scenarios of English futurity seem to have come. On one hand, the idea of reversion to an irrecoverable rurality—the natural wilderness or village condition of a post-British culture. On the other, the more advanced (but also more negative) longing for a virtual dissolution of identity into multiculturalism or 'Europe'—meaning here a broader identity-format within which nations somehow disperse or painlessly cease to matter.

There is no available formula for a post-British England: the issue has simply been avoided in these ways. It would have been better tackled straightforwardly, as Charter 88 demanded—and yet this was impossible, because of the very nature of the old system to which the Charterites

were forced to appeal. Hence it can only be done in a crabwise, half-avowed and belated fashion. Blair's 'project' makes it likely that England will return on the street corner, rather than via a maternity room with appropriate care and facilities. Croaking tabloids, saloon-bar resentment and backbench populism are likely to attend the birth and to have their say. Democracy is constitutional or nothing. Without a systematic form, its ugly cousins will be tempted to move in and demand their rights—*their* nation, the one always sat upon and then at last betrayed by an elite of faint-hearts, half-breeds and alien interests.

PETER WOLLEN

MAGRITTE AND THE BOWLER HAT

VISITING BRUSSELS three years ago, to see the centennial exhibition of Magritte, I was amused to find the city festooned with images of bowler hats, on banners, posters; old placards. There were even real bowler hats in window displays. Magritte had become, so to speak, the patron saint of Brussels and the bowler hat had been chosen as his emblem. It was an apt choice. Magritte painted several dozen images of bowler hats, as well as a large sheaf of drawings and a quantity of recycled versions of the paintings as gouaches. Moreover, Magritte himself was frequently photographed, and filmed, wearing a bowler hat. It seems quite plausible to consider many of these paintings as self-portraits, as his dealer, Alexandre Iolas, did. In that sense, Magritte chose his own emblematic attribute, his own trademark headgear. He consciously became 'The Master of the Bowler Hat'. Why? And what did it mean? Most accounts stress the ordinariness of the man in the bowler hat, his unindividuated character as Everyman, his classlessness or perhaps, more precisely, his petit-bourgeois character, neither cloth-capped nor top-hatted, nor even trilbied or homburged or boatered. I would like to approach the meaning of the bowler hat in a different way, stressing its rich semantic complexity rather than its banality or its blankness.

Magritte's first major work to feature a bowler hat was *The Musings of A Solitary Walker* which dates from 1926, when the artist was in his late twenties. It is dusk. A bowler-hatted man stands with his back to the viewer, silhouetted against a cloudy greeny-blue sky, looking out across the gloomy landscape towards the horizon. To his (and our) left

runs a river, the same colour and tone as the sky, with light glinting off its surface. Some distance down, there is a simple wooden bridge, just where a clear view is broken by some trees, illuminated by some hidden source of light. In the foreground, at the level where the bowler-hatted man's hands have delved into his pockets, floats the naked torso of an androgynous man, rigidly horizontal, his ribs clearly marked and his long neck leading to a shaven head. He has no hair. His eyes are closed and only the lips show any colour. He appears to be floating or levitating, with no visible means of support. His pallid form appears top-lit by some unknown source of illumination, possibly even from within, since it does not affect the ground beneath him, which remains dark. Some commentators have wondered whether this painting might not be related to Magritte's memory of the night his mother committed suicide by jumping from a bridge into the river Sambre and drowning; but he himself always denied any reference of this sort. This is the first appearance of the man in a bowler hat, the characteristic figure, back turned, face invisible, eyes gazing into the distance.

His next appearance is in *The Meaning of Night*, painted the following year. This time there are two figures, one facing away, the other towards us, standing with exactly the same posture, as though they were twins or doubles. Again it is dark. They are standing on a cliff, a few yards from the edge, overlooking the sea, whose white-crested waves are catching the light, like the surface of the river in the previous painting. Fluffy clouds litter the ground, which is illuminated from a light source high up to the left, casting shadows diagonally to the right—towards the sea. In the foreground is what I can only describe as an erotic apparition, floating at knee height above the ground, all fur and lace, feminine, with a single white glove, fingers outstretched, reaching towards the top of two pale silk-stockinged thighs, pulling back the fur to reveal the lace. The silhouette turned away from us, gazing away, is more or less the same as the one in the previous painting. The double, the one turned towards us, is more or less as we might have expected, almost like a fashion plate: hands in pockets, overcoat with five buttons fastened, stiff white collar with neatly knotted dark tie. It is the face which is striking—mask-like, white with no trace of colour, completely symmetrical; a long narrow nose, eyes shut tight beneath arching eyebrows. It is the figure of a dreamer or a somnambulist. If his eyes are closed, we might presume, so are those of his double. He is not gazing out over the cliff and the waves towards the horizon. He is dreaming.

We will never see this face again. It is the only image we have. In this painting, we have been privileged to see the dreamer and the dream. In all the many that follow, we shall have to imagine the dream for ourselves. The next painting with bowler-hatted men is very different. In *The Threatened Assassin*, painted the same year, 1927, we see a murder scene. This time, it is an interior. A woman's body lies stretched out on a couch, naked, blood streaming from her mouth. A man, presumably her murderer, is standing idly, at his ease, one hand in his pocket, listening to a record being played on a phonograph with a horn. His overcoat and hat (not a bowler) are draped over a chair. In the distance, through an open frame, we can see a mountainous landscape and three identical faces, witnesses, peering over a balcony into the room. In the foreground there is a similar proscenium frame opening onto the room, somehow as if it were a stage-set. Lurking, pressed up against the wall on either side, are two bowler-hatted men, dressed exactly like the somnambulist, but with eyes open, looking at an angle in our direction, unable to see the murder scene. One is carrying a cudgel, the other a heavy net. It is often remarked that these two men are detectives of some kind, waiting to apprehend the killer, positioned as if they already knew he had committed the crime, although he still remains hidden from their eyes.

Polyvalence

Also in 1927, or possibly the next year, 1928, Magritte painted *The Reckless Sleeper*, another painting with a bowler hat, related to those I have described but different in that the bowler hat is depicted as an isolated object, enclosed in a bowler-hat-shaped hollow in what is generally described as a lead tablet, with an irregular curved shape of a kind Magritte often favoured. There are a number of other objects enclosed in hollows in a similar way—a bird, a lit candle, an apple and so on. The lead tablet takes up about two thirds of the picture. Above it, in the remaining third, separated by a clean horizontal line is a wooden box, rather like a coffin, marked in whorls and stripes by dark wood-graining. Inside the box, a man with a bald head is lying asleep under a blanket, his head resting on a pillow. Most viewers have assumed that the objects beneath are somehow elements of his dream or, at least, objects we might imagine as such. In fact, a bowler hat soon reappears in an oneiric context in the 1930 painting, *The Key To Dreams*, a reprise of a 1927 painting with the same title and structure, but no hat. This time, the canvas is divided into six equal rectangular spaces, two across

by three down, in which six objects are represented—an egg, labeled 'the Acacia'; a woman's high-heeled shoe, labeled 'the Moon'; a bowler hat, labeled 'the Snow'; a lit candle, labeled 'the Ceiling'; a glass, labeled 'the Storm'; and a mallet, labeled 'the Desert'.

Magritte did not paint another bowler hat for eight years—a work in which the hat is worn by a horseman, followed by one in his 'Renoir' or 'Plein Soleil' period, another horseman and then three, I think, in his 'Vache' period. All the rest, the overwhelming majority, were painted in the fifties and sixties. The foundations, however, were laid in the works I have just described, all executed between 1926 and 1930. In my view, the bowler hats in these crucial early paintings can already be interpreted within five different frames of cultural meaning. In using the phrase, 'cultural meaning', I am talking not about reference or denotation—obviously an image of a bowler hat refers to the everyday object we call a 'bowler hat', even if it is labeled, disjunctively, as 'the Snow'. Nor am I talking about 'connotation', in Roland Barthes's sense, of the way in which an image can support a rhetorical or mythological construction. I am more sympathetic to Carlo Ginzburg's controversial idea, outlined in his account of the hat worn by the Emperor Constantine in Piero Della Francesca's fresco cycle of the Legend of the True Cross, in Arezzo, that we should look for a trail of clues in the historical and social context which will enable us to establish a specific interpretation, rather than treating it as an abstract emblem. It is a happy coincidence, of course, that Ginzburg's iconographic analysis concerns a hat.

In his essay on the Arezzo cycle, Ginzburg seeks to explain the significance of the Emperor's 'white hat coming to a point in front' by relating it to the very similar hat worn by Pope John VIII Paleologus as depicted on two commemorative medals designed by Pisanello. This connection, in turn, serves as a clue that enables Ginzburg to develop a train of argument leading to an overall re-interpretation, via the hat, of the meaning of the cycle. Rather than seeking a single, precise signification for Magritte's use of the image of the bowler hat, I want to suggest that he drew on a variety of different sources from different discourses—discourses which we could see as being compressed, like the rabbit fur and shellac which are the raw materials of a bowler hat, in order to make the dense amalgam which we know as felt. This amalgam carries a polyvalent cultural meaning, not so much a delimited 'signified' in Saussure or Barthes's sense, as a complex field of signification. There are five

quite different discursive sources that I want to discuss, each of which, I believe, fed into Magritte's iconography of the bowler hat. These are the discourse of detective fiction; the discourse of the performing arts; the discourse of Purism; the discourse of fashion; and the discourse of patriarchy. The relevance of these particular sources should come as no surprise when we consider Magritte's own valuation of 'mystery'; his abiding interest in film, both as a viewer and as a performer; the importance of his family background; his origins as a modernist artist; and the impact of his commercial work as an illustrator.

Detectives

First, detective fiction. Magritte, it is well established, was a fan of crime mysteries. He was an avid reader of the adventures of Judex and Fantomas and a viewer of Feuillade's serial film versions, the explicit source of his *The Flame Rekindled* and *The Barbarian*, alongside which he posed to be photographed wearing his bowler hat. He also treasured the Nick Carter and Nat Pinkerton stories, which were neighbours of Poe, Lautréamont and Breton on his bookshelves. Magritte must have been aware that the detectives in both the Fantomas and Judex cycles wore bowler hats, as was customary for fictional detectives in general. Back in 1908, A. A. Milne, author of *Wind In The Willows*, described the party chasing Toad of Toad Hall after his escape from prison as led by 'shabbily dressed men in pot-hats, obvious and unmistakable plain-clothes detectives even at this distance, waving revolvers and walking-sticks.' Ernest Shepard's vivid illustration of the scene clearly shows that the 'pot-hats' were, in fact, bowlers. The bowler-hatted figures in *The Threatened Assassin* are just such a pair of plain-clothes men, armed not with revolver and walking-stick but cudgel and net, denizens of an uncanny and mysterious realm whose unsettling and dreamlike quality Magritte hoped to emulate in his own art.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning another pair of bowler-hatted Belgian detectives—Dupont and Dupond (or, in English translation, Thomson and Thompson) who first made their appearance, as yet unnamed, in Hergé's second Tintin story, *Tintin In The Congo*, published in 1930, just three years after Magritte had painted *The Murderer Threatened*. Albert Algoud, in his entertaining survey of the Dupondts' career, traces the ancestry of Hergé's pair back to Jules Verne's novel of 1879, *The Tribulations of A Chinese in China*, with its twin pair of lookalike and

bowler-hatted agents, Craig and Fry. He also mentions the possible influence of Laurel and Hardy, whose first films together in bowler hats were actually made in 1928, two years before Hergé launched his farcical double act, but one year after Magritte's painting. Hercule Poirot, another Belgian detective, who made his first appearance in 1931, is also represented in visual images as wearing a bowler hat, although I have not yet been able to find any textual warrant for this—the first book in which he appears, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, confirms that he was something of a dandy and indeed wore a hat, but never specifies precisely what sort of hat it was. The tradition of the detective in a bowler hat, I am glad to note, lasted right through to the 1960s, with Steed in the British television serial, *The Avengers*, a kind of latter-day *Fantomas* fully in the Feuillade tradition.

Comedians

Dupond and Dupont themselves combined the discourse of the detective with that of the performing arts, specifically the knockabout comedian. Their hats are jammed down over their eyes, sat upon, knocked into the water, exchanged by accident, dissolved into glop and repeatedly subjected to ludicrous disaster. The great precursor of the comic use of the bowler hat, of course, was Charles Chaplin, who first donned his 'Tramp' or 'Little Fellow' costume in February 1914, either for *Mabel's Strange Predicament*, as Chaplin himself recalled, or for *Kid Auto Races In Venice*, which was released earlier, but probably shot later. Chaplin had often worn a bowler hat, on and off stage—there is a photograph of him sporting one in 1906, a young man appearing in *Casey's Court Circus*, a knockabout musical act, and he certainly wore one when he was featured in Fred Karno's troupe. But the 1914 costume went beyond just wearing a bowler hat as a comic accessory. It created a character. As Chaplin remarked, it was based on the formal idea of contrast—at the extremities, a hat which was too small and boots which were too large, in the middle, a tight jacket and a pair of baggy trousers, all topped off with a 'hooky malacca cane'. Chaplin is important, not so much because we can demonstrate any specific influence on Magritte, but because he dominated the iconography of the bowler hat in general. Perhaps if there was a direct relationship, it lies with the importance of the back-view silhouette that became Magritte's favoured pose for his own bowler-hatted man, with the difference that Chaplin's silhouette was dramatically mobile whereas Magritte favoured the ponderously static.

Most important of all, Chaplin fixed the image of the bowler hat firmly in the public consciousness in a number of contradictory ways, reflecting the paradoxical character of Chaplin's own screen persona. Chaplin combined knockabout comedy with pathos and childlike innocence. He could be both cruel and sentimental. His behaviour was often futile and ludicrous, but he retained a threadbare dignity and stubborn self-confidence throughout. Chaplin's antics had both an ethical and a nihilist dimension. He appealed to intellectuals as well as to vulgarians. Magritte, like almost everybody else, was an admirer of Chaplin, as well as Laurel and Hardy, whose films he collected on Super-8 and whose bowler-hatted comedy routines he enthusiastically imitated in his own home movies. Old music hall routines like the exchange of bowler hats re-surface in Magritte's films just as they do in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*—and at roughly the same time, too. Bowler hats, umbrellas, tubas and pipes are all repeated elements in his film farces—he mimics his paintings by putting a bowler hat on a shrouded head, he puts a series of hats on a bust, he uses the shadow silhouette of a bowler hat. In one sequence, his wife Georgette (wearing a von Stroheim-style spiky military helmet) salutes a painting of a bowler-hatted man standing with his back to us. Magritte's art is often treated as though it was always basically serious. We should not forget that it was often ludicrous and absurd, even stupidly so. As his close friend Louis Scutenaire put it, 'his genius lies in his imbecility.'

Chaplin's influence also penetrated the artistic avant garde, particularly after the success of *The Kid*. Moreover, it was in France that the first recognition came—in Cocteau's script for the ballet *Parade*, his 'Little American Girl' did a Charlie Chaplin imitation as well as dancing a ragtime, composed by Satie. But Picasso's pantomime horse took the theme further than Cocteau had intended—instead of being a thundering charger, it turned out to be a dilapidated beast that only provoked hilarity. In Cocteau's words it was a 'fantomas taxi horse mounted by Charlie Chaplin.' At Picasso's insistence the horse stayed. (A footnote: Picasso had already painted a *Still Life With Bowler Hat* back in 1910, usually construed as a joking reference to Georges Braque, who habitually wore a bowler at that time (in its turn a homage to Cézanne whose own tall bowler, known as a 'Kronstadt', figured in his self-portrait of 1883–85). Then, in 1921, Louis Delluc's book *Charlot* came out, applauding Chaplin for turning the cinema into a modern art form. It was translated into English the following year and its influence spread world-

wide. In 1923, Fernand Léger made his famous drawing of Charlot for Ivan Goll's *Chaplinade* and, the same year, bowler hats figured prominently in his film, *Ballet Mécanique*, as they also did in another 1923 avant-garde film, Hans Richter's *Imps Before Breakfast* (*Vormittagsspuk*), with its bewitched bowlers flying through the air, tormenting their would-be wearers. Soon after came two more major Léger still lifes featuring bowlers, and the first of his life-long series of *Three Musicians*, with the tuba player always bowler hatted. Léger's original Chaplin is clearly puppet-like, not simply a figure for a modern *commedia dell'arte*, as in *Parade*, but rather more like Mr Punch.

The same is true of the bowler-hatted stick figures that inhabit the Lancashire mill towns painted by L. S. Lowry. Lowry, too, was a great music hall fan, a particular admirer of Chaplin's mentor, Fred Karno, whose troupe made him laugh 'until the tears ran down his cheeks'. His bowler-hatted figures, he agreed, were like marionettes 'and if you pulled the strings they would cock their legs up', as Chaplin did, of course, when he skeetered round a corner. 'I look upon human beings as automatons,' Lowry once observed. 'They all think they can do what they want, but they can't you know,' which makes them 'funny beyond belief'. At the same time, he 'liked the working-class bowler hats, the big boots and shawls.' Lowry was a great admirer of Magritte's work, especially the bowler-hatted figures, 'because they all looked so ordinary', as John Rothenstem recalled. About his own work, he noted that 'all the people in my pictures, they are all alone, you know. They have all got their private sorrows, their own absorption. But they can't contact one another. We are all of us alone—cut off. All my people are lonely. Crowds are the most lonely thing of all.' He could almost be discussing Magritte's figures. Léger represented Chaplin with this same object-like quality, turning him into a marionette, just as Magritte's figures often remind us of tailor's dummies. In his 1953 *Golconda*, serried ranks of bowler-hatted men float in front of an urban backdrop, all staring forward. *Golconda*, Magritte explained, is 'a magical city'. 'The bowler, on the other hand, poses no surprises. It is a head-dress that is not original. The man with the bowler is just bourgeois man in his anonymity. And I wear it. I am not eager to singularize myself.' Wigan—working class anonymity and somnambulism. Brussels—bourgeois. The same lonely crowd, each imprisoned by self-absorption, free only in their dreams.

Purists

In his early pre-Surrealist years as an artist, Magritte went successively through the influence first of Purism and then of Dadaism. During the Purist period, he became a close colleague of a fellow painter, Victor Servranckx. Servranckx was artistic director of a wallpaper manufacturing firm in Brussels, Peeters-Lacroix, and obtained a job there for Magritte, work which supported him for a number of years. Servranckx considered himself a Purist and contributed to the central journal of the movement—Le Corbusier and Ozenfant's *L'Esprit nouveau*, as well as co-writing an unpublished Purist manifesto with Magritte, *Pure Art, in Defence of Aesthetics*. Perhaps the primary tenet of Purism was its insistence that everyday manufactured objects were the proper subject for modern art—and indeed were aesthetic objects in their own right. Léger's Purist works of this period are full of such objects—keys, ball-bearings, jugs, balusters, bowler hats, bottles, pipes and so on. In this context, it is worth looking, too, at Le Corbusier's impact on Magritte. Not only did Le Corbusier programmatically wear a bowler hat, as a good Purist should, but he wrote a crucial manifesto celebrating it as an aesthetic object. The point I wish to make is that Magritte's later use of the bowler hat owed a great deal to Purism, as indeed did Surrealism in general, although Breton's cult of the 'poetic object' may seem, at first sight, the polar opposite of Le Corbusier's rationalism and functionalism. The crucial point of shared reference was their interest in everyday objects, first as evolved 'types' and then as sites of magical power.

In Le Corbusier's polemical book, *The Decorative Art of Today*, a collection of essays written in response to the massive 1924 Paris Decorative Arts Exhibition, a crucial chapter was headed 'Other Icons—The Museums'. Le Corbusier's purpose was to attack the underlying assumptions of contemporary Decorative Arts museums and suggest an alternative aesthetic programme that they should adopt forthwith. I quote:

Let us imagine a true museum, one that contains everything, one that could present a complete picture after the passage of time, after the destruction by time (and how well it knows how to destroy! So well, so completely, that almost nothing remains except objects of great show, of great vanity, of great fancy, which always survive disasters, testifying to vanity's indestructible powers). In order to flesh out our idea, let us put together a museum of our own day with objects of our own day; to begin:

A plain jacket, a bowler hat, a well-made shoe. An electric light bulb with bayonet fixing; a radiator, a table cloth of white linen; our everyday drinking glasses, and bottles of various shapes, in which we keep our Mercurey, our Graves, or simply our *ordinaire* . . . A number of bentwood chairs with caned seats like those invented by Thonet of Vienna—and then on to the wash-basin, the watch, the suitcase, the filing cabinet and the illustration of a pipe.

The importance of Le Corbusier's manifesto, of course, in the context of Magritte's development as an artist, lies in its unremitting stress on the significance and aesthetic value of the ordinary and its distaste for show, for vanity and for fancy, all things which Magritte strongly distrusted—including surrealist fancy, like that of Delvaux. In fact, towards the end of *The Decorative Art of Today*, Le Corbusier goes on to discuss the Surrealists' attitude to the object. He comments that 'the supremely elegant relationships of their metaphors—as they impress one who is not such a 'high dreamer'—are all the time very clearly dependent on the products of straightforward conscious effort, sustained and logical, cross-checked by the necessary mathematics and geometry—the necessary exactitude for the functioning of mechanisms, etc.' Magritte, too, fiercely resisted automatism and always insisted that he worked consciously and precisely. Le Corbusier went on to conclude:

So the poets of Surrealism can only base their poetics on realism, this realism which is the magnificent fruit of the machine age and of which we are still so far from tired that they themselves hook onto it in the skein of their dreams. The product of the machine age is a realist object capable of high poetry. We approve so much of this object, we are so fond of it, we would so much like to live with it, that our desire adds to its utility the higher dignity! *The realist object of utility is beautiful*. Such is the final conclusion of the spirit forged in the labours of the age. So we have to reconsider what is beautiful for us, to recognize what is beautiful for us. A *beauty* that is made from objects whose relationships exalt us.

Magritte's conversion to Surrealism did not require as great a rupture with Purism as one might have imagined. He took from Purism, of course, only those elements necessary to the new vision that Surrealism imparted, but among those images that crossed the divide was that of the bowler hat. From the start, the bowler was intended to be functional—it was designed at the request of an English landowner as protective head-wear for his gamekeepers, made of compressed felt and fitting snugly,

so that it was securely fixed on the head. (He was worried it might be dislodged during an encounter with a poacher.) As such it was a model of simple, purified design, a hemisphere resting on an annular brim shaped in a symmetrical wave pattern. At the same time, this masterpiece of functionalism was open to a multitude of metaphoric expansions of meaning. The hard, shaped, static, black object could be labeled as 'snow': soft, shapeless, mobile, white. Its very ordinari-ness could become mysterious. In the 1950s and 1960s, when Magritte painted the great majority of his bowler-hatted figures, their poetic beauty emerged from their being, as Le Corbusier put it, hooked on to the skein of their dreams—dreams which themselves involved everyday objects—the moon, the glass, the loaf of bread, and even the *Primavera* of Botticelli, which Magritte preferred as a mass-produced image on a postcard, rather than as a great painting, a unique masterpiece. He was not impressed when he saw the showy original in Florence.

Fashion

From early on, through his work as a fashion illustrator, Magritte must have thought of the bowler hat as a functional and commercial object. While he never designed posters simply for bowler hats as such, he did work on advertisements for a wide range of everyday products, which are represented in a precise geometrical Purist style—cigarette packs, glasses, bottles. In 1924 he had left his job at the wallpaper company and begun to work for the fashion designer, Norine, the wife of Paul-Gustave Van Hecke, an art dealer and close friend of Magritte's own friend E. L. T. Mesens. As Carine Fol has pointed out, a number of Magritte's familiar motifs are first introduced in his Norine fashion plates, such as the picture within a picture and the stage curtain framing a scene. We might add the Stockman 'form' or display dummy, often converging with Magritte's familiar *bilboquet* shape. Then, in 1926, he also began to work for the Samuels fur company. His images, at that time, became much more realistic, moving away from the last, lingering post-Cubist influences—'Around 1925, I decided only to paint objects with all their visible details because this was the only way in which my research could develop.' In the second Samuels catalogue, on which Magritte worked closely with Paul Nougé, he collaged a photographic image of himself with eyes closed, playing the somnambulistic dreamer, while, in the background, we see a model wearing a fur coat, foreshadowing

The Meaning of the Night. And in 1928 he illustrated a Norine gown for *Psyché, le miroir des belles choses*, while on the directly opposite page there is an ad for 'Maison Basile, Piccadilly's Hatters' (*sic*), featuring a bowler hat.

The confusion of dummy, *bilboquet* and human figure can also be seen in Magritte's 1926 painting, *Nocturne*, in which a man dressed in black and white, with a high collar and black tie, leans over a female figure sitting up in bed—each of them with the familiar, spherical *bilboquet* head, like a chess piece. In *The Conqueror*, also from 1926, a dummy with white shirt, stiff high collar, black tie and black jacket occupies the foreground of the painting. In the place of his head there is a simple wooden plank, protruding up from the collar. The *Denizens of the River*, painted in 1927, also features a clothed headless dummy. These amalgams of fashion plate with surrealist scene lead directly on to the very first bowler hat paintings, in which mannequin and human figure merge in the bowler-hatted man. I would like to suggest that Magritte favoured the bowler hat precisely because of its hemispherical shape, rhyming, so to speak, with that of the 'head' of the chesspiece, itself a stylized anthropomorphic form of the *bilboquet*. It is, after all, the natural hat to place snugly on a mannequin's bald head—like those in *The Face of Genius* or *An End to Contemplation*, both works from 1927, which was also the year in which groups of isolated objects first appeared in Magritte's repertoire, as in the suggestively named *One Night Museum*.

Fathers

It is significant, too, that Magritte's parents were both employed in the garment business. His grandfather had been a tailor and his father, Léopold, was described as a commercial traveller, thought to mean that he was a garment salesman, since on Magritte's birth certificate he is described, more grandly, as a merchant tailor. On the marriage certificate, Magritte's mother, Régina, was designated a *modiste* and other sources characterize her as a specialist in hats. His father was even photographed in a shirt with a stiff, high collar and an overcoat, carrying what could be either an umbrella or a cane and wearing, of course, a bowler hat. This brings us, in turn, to the fifth form of the discourse of the bowler hat—the patriarchal. A surprising number of artists who used the bowler hat in their work themselves had fathers who wore bowler hats—not only Magritte, but also Beckett, Lowry and Hergé, for example.

(Hergé's father was actually one of a pair of bowler-hatted twins.) The wearing of the bowler was passed on from father to son and failure to comply could lead to family drama, as Samuel Beckett discovered when he returned home from Paris wearing a beret. Among Irish Protestants, of course, the bowler hat had long carried a particularly strong emotional charge, as we are still reminded every year by the ritual marches of bowler-hatted Orangemen through the streets of Ulster. Beckett was also expected to undertake the definitive act of filial piety, of full incorporation into the world of bowler hat, by going into the family business. In a way, Magritte did just that, if we can interpret his fashion illustration for Norine, Samuels and the others as entering the fashion trade. He had fulfilled his duty and earned the right to wear his bowler hat.

In Beckett's story *First Love*, the narrating monologist recalls that 'they gave me . . . a hat. Now the truth is they never gave me a hat, I have always had my own hat, the one my father gave me, and I have never had any other hat than that hat. I may add it has followed me to the grave.' In another story, *The Expelled*, the monologist asks, 'How describe this hat? And why? When my head had attained I shall not say its definitive but its maximum dimensions, my father said to me, "Come, son, we are going to buy your hat," as though it had pre-existed from time immemorial in a pre-established place. He went straight to the hat. I personally had no say in the matter, nor had the hatter. I have often wondered if my father's purpose was not to humiliate me, if he was not jealous of me who was young and handsome, fresh at least, while he was already old and all bloated and purple.' It was a sign of premature aging, of loss of freedom. Hats for Beckett, and particularly bowler hats, are also associated with civility (straightening, adjusting, tipping, touching, albeit gingerly, doffing, removing, the flurrying of hats at funerals), with separation (grabbed, seized, snatched, fallen to the ground, trampled on, sailing through the air, flying off but not getting far because of the string), with protection (against stones, against rain, against the roof of the cab), with exchange (for the phial of calmative which will ease eventual death, for a kiss, for another hat or series of hats, tendered and taken), for study (peering into, examining, contemplating, feeling into, judging), for emptying (shaken, knocked on the crown, blown into) and finally, for display (mincingly, like a mannequin). Beckett's hats also suffer from refunctioning, practical or metaphoric—as begging bowl, as milk pail, as helmet, as chamber pot, as frisbee (shades of Oddjob!), as cathedral dome, as a second pustular skull.

Modernity

Magritte's hats, in contrast, are usually just bowlers, sitting on the head or exhibited as simple objects. The only exceptions I have noticed were the 1952 *Everyday Magic*, showing a smouldering bowler hat with a baby suspended above it in the smoke, two works from the 'Vache' period, one featuring a hat with an eye looking out on the world, the other with a protruding tap as if from a cistern. Then there is *The Patch of Night*, a bearded bowler hat from 1965 and *The Horrendous Stopper* (1966), a single bowler labeled 'For External Use Only', as though it were the stopper for a container filled with something dangerous—for a mind, perhaps, filled with dreams or subversive thoughts. (After he was crowned, Babar, the elephant king, gave his bowler hat to his chief minister Cornelius because Cornelius was good at thinking.) *The Horrendous Stopper* is the same Magritte work, incidentally, which the Young British Artist Gavin Turk, best known for his waxwork of himself as Sid Vicious, included in his slide piece on the theme of Britishness, a cascade of metaphoric British objects—the bowler hat following logically after a cup of milky tea, Stonehenge, fish and chips, William Morris's Red House and so forth. Magritte, however, eschewed metaphor. He always claimed that his objects were just ordinary things, like his figures who were not 'characters' or 'individuals' but generic 'human beings'—and yet there are still many affinities between Magritte and Beckett. Primarily, I think, this is because their sense of the bowler hat as typically a patriarchal object leads both of them to associate it with the traditional—the singular, after all, is usually associated with the new, the commonplace with the old.

In his 1938 work, *The Endless Chain*, painted for Edward James, Magritte depicted three riders on a single horse, each representing, as he explained to his patron, one of three historical epochs—the first, a curly-headed rider in a short tunic, representing antiquity; the second, a gallant musketeer, 'all top-boots and plumed hat'; the third, 'our modern cavalier, with bowler hat and flowing cravat.' Here, in contrast, Magritte explicitly assigns the bowler hat to modernity, to the period since 1850 when Lock's of St James sold their very first bowler to William Coke. Yet already, even at that time, the bowler was inscribed into the register of tradition. William Coke, after all, was a landed aristocrat, the future Earl of Leicester. Gradually the bowler hat seeped down through the social

order, from aristocracy to gentry, to bourgeoisie, to petty bourgeoisie, to proletarian, to underclass. In this sense, as Fred Miller Robinson argues in his pioneering book on *The Man In The Bowler Hat*, it became the universal classless hat of modern times. Yet, from another point of view, it began and remained a traditional hat, a hat which always aspired upwards, towards the world of the aristocracy, with its timeless, unchanging, fetishized values. A dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist like King Edward VII of England would expostulate with rage when he saw a bowler hat being worn in London. He considered it a country hat. In the country it began and there it certainly should remain, on the heads of the gentry and their gamekeepers. In the late nineteenth century, so the story goes, a traditionalist French lawyer would wear his bowler on the train into Paris. At the station he would hand it to a servant, who would hand him his top hat in exchange. All day, he would wear the top hat and then in the evening, at the station, the exchange would be repeated in reverse and he would return to the country in his bowler. On the side of the future, Lenin himself wore a bowler hat as he played chess with Gorky in Capri. Yet, thirty years on, the actor Maxim Straukh would wear another bowler hat as period costume when he portrayed Lenin in Stalinist films. The bowler could never quite shake off the echoes of the past and, in the end, it was fated, once again, to be seen as traditional.

George Melly tells a story of how, while Magritte was in England, painting for Edward James, Mesens tried to persuade him 'to buy a superior bowler hat from Lock's in St James's Street, but that Magritte had indignantly refused on the grounds (which the choice of objects in his work makes obvious) that he preferred a mass-produced model.' Magritte, Melly notes, was forced to shop at 'cheap gent's outfitters' from poverty, but then made a virtue of necessity by turning his 'clerk-like off-the-peg appearance' into a trademark. When Magritte became richer, in the 1950s, as a result of his increasing fame and the exertions of his dealer, he stuck with the trademark. But by now the bowler hat was no longer the anonymous headgear of Everyman. On the contrary, it stuck out. It signalled an allegiance to 'retro' traditionalism, whether for defiantly reactionary or for studiously parodic, even camp reasons. Bowler hats disappeared from the Simpson's catalogue but clerks in the City of London still went on wearing them, as Pooter's colleagues had worn them in the Grossmiths' *Diary of A Nobody*, as T. S. Eliot had worn a bowler when he worked for Lloyds Bank at 17 Cornhill and later at Faber and Faber, just as MacHeath in *The Threepenny Opera* had worn a

bowler to show his ambition to become a banker. British Guards officers were instructed 'to wear bowler hats and carry rolled umbrellas' when in mufti. In the sixties, outrageous reactionaries like 'Lucky' Lucan, with his closets full of identical Saville Row suits, and Evelyn Waugh, in his loud checked-tweed and Gilbert Pinfold period, both affected fetishistic bowlers. At the same time, reactionary Edwardianism was parodied by the dandified wave of 'mods'. Across the street, so to speak, the 'trad' fans of revivalist jazz musicians like Acker Bilk wore bowlers as a cult item, harking back nostalgically to the great black musicians who had clowned their way into the affection of whites by using their derby hat as a mute.

Fetish

The bowler hat was now entering the period when it became an erotic fetish-wear for women—dancers and singers in Bob Fosse movies, Madonna on the stage, Armani models on the catwalk. The key artistic reference here is to *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, first published in 1984, but largely set in the 1960s, when Magritte's assembly-line production of bowler hat paintings was reaching its greatest intensity. It is a book which centres around two symbolic women—Tereza, the protagonist's wife, and Sabina, his mistress, standing respectively for the 'heaviness' and 'lightness' which mark the extreme poles of 'being'. Tereza returns to eke out her days in her native village. Sabina's ashes are scattered into the Pacific off the California coast. It is Sabina, of course, who wears the bowler hat, as an erotic come-on and a fetishistic prop in her sex life. Tereza is unfamiliar with bowler hats. Kundera notes, writing of her first encounter with the hat on a fraught visit to Sabina's apartment, that 'it was the kind of hat—black, hard, round—that Tereza had seen only on the screen, the kind of hat Chaplin wore.' It takes her far back over the years, back to what now seems like a golden age, those happy but distant Chaplinesque times. For Sabina, in contrast, the hat has a number of very personal meanings, which Kundera carefully expounds for us:

First, it was a vague reminder of a forgotten grandfather, the mayor of a small Bohemian town during the nineteenth century.

Second, it was a memento of her father. After the funeral her brother appropriated all their parents' property, and she, refusing out of sover-

eign contempt to fight for her rights, announced sarcastically that she was taking the bowler hat as her sole inheritance.

Third, it was a prop for her love games with Tomas.

Fourth, it was a sign of her originality, which she consciously cultivated. She could not take much with her when she emigrated, and taking this bulky, impractical thing meant giving up other, more practical ones.

Fifth, now that she was abroad, the hat was a sentimental object. When she went to visit Tomas in Zurich, she took it along and had it on her head when she opened the hotel room door. But then something she had not reckoned with happened: the hat, no longer jaunty or sexy, turned into a monument to time past.

In an uncanny way, all five of these meanings apply also to Magritte—the bowler as patriarchal heirloom, the bowler as fetishized object, the bowler as witness of dandyism, the bowler as sign of eccentricity and, last but not least, the bowler as ‘monument to time’. ‘The bowler hat,’ Kundera notes, ‘was a motif in the musical composition that was Sabina’s life. It returned again and again, each time with a different meaning and all the meanings flowed through the bowler hat like water through a river-bed.’ Each ‘semantic river’, Kundera explains, would give rise to a new meaning, ‘though all former meanings would resonate, like an echo, like a parade of echoes, with the new ones.’ It is with this metaphor in mind that we can best understand the complex meanings which the bowler hat acquired for Magritte. The different echoes were often incongruous and, as time went by, their resonance would change. The first time Magritte’s bowler-hatted man stared out over the landscape he was ‘light’, in Kundera’s terms, mysterious and mobile. But by the time that Magritte’s repetition compulsion had worked its way through year after year and image after image, he had become ‘heavy’, recognizable and rooted.

For Seurat, Lautrec, Cézanne or Caillebotte, the bowler hats they painted were simply part of everyday life, the leisure wear of a Sunday tripper at Asnières or the habitué of a Montmartre dance-hall. For the Cubists, for Picasso and Braque, painting a bowler hat involved an element of homage. For Le Corbusier and Lowry and Chaplin, all born at the end of the 1880s, it had become an everyday ‘type’, a commonplace. For Ernst and Raderscheidt and Magritte, it could be invested with a certain mysterious melancholy. For Beckett, the Chaplinesque was re-invented,

imbued with melancholy and even abject despair. For Kundera, the bowler hat had become a monument. By now it was useless rather than useful, eccentric rather than universal, fetishistic rather than poetic. Magritte entered the chain in the 1920s, but unlike his coevals he was still stubbornly painting bowler-hatted men forty years later, at the end of the 1960s. In the very last paintings of this lifelong series, their figures have become completely transparent. In each, only the familiar outline silhouette is left, cut into a monochrome background, with stormy sea or moonlit night or mountainous landscape inscribed luminously within. It is as if the bowler-hatted man himself has vanished clean away. He is less than a phantom now. He is an empty screen.

HENRI JACOT

AN UNSUSPECTED COLLECTIVISM?

THE STARTING POINT of Robin Blackburn's study of 'Grey Capitalism', published in *New Left Review* 233, is unimpeachable. He is right to say that the complex and anarchic world of contemporary capitalism cannot be tamed either by the Keynesian welfare state or traditional, 'autarchic' communism. This is an argument all the more welcome for resisting the siren song of a 'New Age' in which the distinction between Left and Right has ceased to be relevant, and a 'Third Way' lies ahead, trumpeted nowhere more than in the land of Blair and Giddens. If we wish to keep faith with the historic aspirations of the Left, we must begin with a critical analysis of the new configuration of global capitalism. A merely practical opposition to the present drive of neo-liberalism, of the kind represented by current social or ecological movements, is not enough. A new vision of a society founded on the values of social and political equality, public intervention and democratic control of the economy will not emerge spontaneously. We cannot depend merely on more or less instinctive condemnations of individualism and the free market. Our task must be, as Marx would have said, to 'penetrate the secret laboratory of production', to capture the inmost nature of this society and find ways of mastering it. Blackburn is therefore quite right to focus on problems of socializing the process of accumulation, as the ground on which social, civic and ecological movements should converge.

Is Blackburn correct, however, to suggest that what he dubs our current 'grey capitalism' might be reformed into a 'new collectivism' through popular control of pension funds? This recalls a line of argument already

strongly advanced in France by Michel Aglietta, to whom he refers in his introduction.¹ Blackburn employs the term 'grey capitalism' to indicate both that the financial structure of contemporary capitalism now rests essentially on the pension and insurance funds of those in or approaching retirement, and that the exercise of property rights in this sort of capitalism is delegated to managers who act according to financial criteria of their own, rather than in the interests of the supposed fundholders.

In the US and Britain, pension and insurance funds hold about half of the value of shares and bonds quoted on Wall Street and in the City; but these pseudo-collective property rights are in fact playthings in the hands of managers whose only goal is to 'outperform' average returns in a footloose international financial system. It is just here, however, that Blackburn thinks the vulnerability of this sort of capitalism lies. His thesis is that these funds, the driving force behind the present casino capitalism, could be transformed into the nucleus of a new collectivism if a number of conditions were met. These he spells out as follows: firstly, all citizens must be covered by such funds; secondly, they must be able to have a direct say in their management; and thirdly, there must be a fiscal and legal framework for such funds which embodies a new definition of the general interest. Certainly, these conditions are far from being met in either the United States or Britain, the cases Blackburn considers in detail.

Thus the proportion of wage-earners covered by a pension fund in the United States, far from increasing, actually fell between 1987 and 1995, from 53 to 40 per cent. Moreover, these employees are now covered increasingly by funds with defined contributions (DC) and decreasingly by funds with defined benefits (DB)—the proportion of the latter falling from 28 to 19 per cent between 1989 and 1995.² The difference between the two systems is very pointed. Under DB, the size of the retirement pension is determined in advance and guaranteed by the employer and/or state; under DC, the size of the pension depends on the speculative performance of the funds, so that the pensioner bears the entire financial risk.

¹ See Michel Aglietta's afterword to the new Verso edition of his *Regulation and Capitalist Crisis*, to appear in the spring of 2000, first published in English as 'Capitalism at the Turn of the Century: Regulation Theory and the Challenge of Social Change', NLR 232, November–December 1998; and his brochure *Le capitalisme de demain*, Fondation Saint-Simon, Paris November 1998.

² See in particular Jacques Nikonoff, *La comédie des fonds de pension*, Paris 1999.

So far as collective intervention by wage-earners or their representatives in the management of these funds is concerned, we can scarcely speak of anything more than vague ideas. Since 1996, when John Sweeney became leader of the AFL-CIO, there has been some talk within the unions of attempting to shift such funds—especially those with defined contributions—from the ‘downward competitive pressures’ of ‘short-termism’ to a more ‘long-termist’ approach where competitive pressures would be ‘upwards’, with the trade-unions taking a more active hand in their management.³ But so far it is only talk. As for a fiscal system capable of making pension funds an instrument of egalitarian progress, with redistributive measures to assist the working poor, the unemployed and under-employed, no such thing is even remotely on the horizon. On the contrary, as Blackburn himself rightly points out, all that exists today is a system of tax relief designed to hand most advantage to those who have most money to save.

Thus, even if we confine ourselves to Anglo-American capitalism, the notion that a ‘new collectivism’ is on any plausible agenda seems highly questionable, so distant are current realities from the conditions it supposes. There is an element of paradox, at the very least, in the mention of Clinton’s suggestion to Congress that a proportion of public retirement funds be invested on the stock exchange as a way of increasing their yield. Even Greenspan pointed out that this would expose them to the risks of already very inflated share prices. We need, moreover, to make more of a distinction between the United States and the United Kingdom. For British capitalism is even more thoroughly ‘financialized’ than its American counterpart. In the US, unlike the UK, there are local pension funds run by public bodies—teachers, municipal employees, firemen, policemen, and so on—which play a not insignificant role in financing small and medium enterprises in the locality, by investing ‘below the market’.⁴

Pension funds are a reality in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and it does not look as if they are going to go away; so any proposal that social or trade-union forces take part in their management seems welcome. It is another matter altogether, however, to extend this concept to other coun-

³ See for example Regina Markey, *Workers’ Pension Funds and the ‘Low Road’ to Profitability: the Downsizing Dilemma*, AFL-CIO Public Employee Department, www.uswa.org

⁴ This is rightly pointed out by Nikonoff, *La comédie des fonds de pension*. For the now highly financial character of British capitalism, see notably Richard Farnetti, *Le Royaume désuni*, Paris 1995.

tries where the retirement system is not already based on them. This brings us to the particular case of France, and in a more general way to continental Europe.

The French example

Blackburn at one point rightly remarks that the precise form a hypothetical passage from 'grey capitalism' to a 'new collectivism' might take would depend heavily on 'existing arrangements' in each country or region—but then proceeds to argue as if the various capitalisms were more or less identical in the way they link pension systems to capital accumulation. In fact, however, it is plain that in the Anglo-American model the heavy—though not exclusive⁵—reliance of the pension system on capitalization is related to a process of accumulation principally based on 'financial markets' in the true sense of the term, whereas in continental Europe an essentially pay-as-you-go pension system⁶ is associated with an accumulation process organized, at least to date, mainly around 'financial centres', to use F. Morin's suggestive distinction.⁷ Although, of course, there are many differences of detail between the French model of holding companies with 'overlapping directorships' and the Rhenish system of 'industrial banks', both have been relatively independent of financial markets, and both have been coupled with pension systems based almost exclusively on pay-as-you-go principles. It is just this pattern that is now under threat from the twin pressures of liberalization and globalization, so it is no surprise that in both France and Germany public debate has started to focus, albeit in confused fashion, on pension funds.

⁵ In his exhaustive survey *Retraites et fonds de pension—état de la question en France et à l'étranger*, Paris 1997, E. Charpentier rightly emphasizes that in every country, with the single exception of Chile, but including the US, a considerable part of the pension system remains based on general taxation, in acknowledgement of the extent to which all citizens belong to the same society.

⁶ Translator's note: Pensions paid out on a pay-as-you-go basis are covered by current contributions from employees, employers and the state. In the French system, this scheme is jointly administered by representatives of employees, employers and the state, and pensions have been set at a comparatively generous rate, linked to final salary.

⁷ Morin's more recent works include his Report to the Ministry of Finance on *Le modèle français de détention et de gestion du capital*, April 1998, and his article 'La rupture du modèle français de détention et gestion des capitaux', in *La Revue d'Economie Financière*, November 1998.

In Germany, despite the joint Blair-Schroder manifesto, proposals for compulsory contributions to complementary retirement pensions—drawn up by the Minister of Social Affairs Walter Riester, formerly deputy head of IG-Metall—have had to be abandoned by the government in the face of strong hostility from Klaus Zwickel, the leader of IG-Metall, not to speak of opposition within the SPD itself. In France the Commissioner for Planning, Jean-Michel Charpin, has submitted a report to Jospin on the future of the French pension system.⁸ One of its weaknesses is that it fails to distinguish two problems that need to be separated before they can usefully be related: financing of pensions and financing of the economy.⁹ In the French discussion, most of what needs to be said about pension funds as a false solution to the first question has been widely aired. Indeed, the whole notion of 'demographic ageing' has come under sharp fire, with its associated social panic at the prospect of increasing levels of dependence or declining participation in the labour force, based on often dubious assumptions concerning real rates of unemployment, growth and productivity. The bogus superiority of capitalized over pay-as-you-go schemes, the lack of realism in proposals to extend contributions in periods of under-employment and so forth, have been thoroughly criticized.¹⁰ In my view, there is little more to be said. It is perfectly clear that the only reasonable future for the French pensions system is a strengthening, if also perhaps recasting, of its pay-as-you-go principles.

There is, however, a further argument to be heard for the introduction of private pension funds in France. It maintains that French capitalism is vulnerable in its structures of capitalization. Because France lacks powerful institutional investors able to dominate stock markets, so the argument goes, France may be in the process of losing control of its own productive enterprises, as British or American pension funds supplant traditional French 'banking complexes' as principal players on the Paris Bourse. The sudden collapse in the share price of Alcatel in September 1998, triggered by the partial divestment of its stock by American Fidelity, was a vivid reminder of this danger.

⁸ See Pierre Khalfa and Pierre-Yves Chanu (eds), *L'Avenir de nos retraites au péril du libéralisme*, Fondation Copernic, Paris 1999.

⁹ See the chapter on 'the rise of pension funds' in the annual report of ISERES, the CGT's institute for economic and social research, *À la croisée des chemins*, Paris 1999.

¹⁰ See notably A. Lechevelier, 'Les retraites: idées fausses et vrais enjeux', *Mouvements*, 3, March–April 1999. I would also mention 'Retraites—les enjeux de l'emploi et de la solidarité', *Analyse et Documents économiques*, 79, May 1999.

For those who believe that the structure of ownership in a capitalist economy is of vital importance, this is an argument that cannot be simply dismissed.¹¹ But the solution is not to substitute Anglo-American pension funds pursuing maximum speculative targets (yields of 15 per cent) with 'French' versions which in practice would have to operate on the same lines. The logic of individual enrichment through financial assets is plainly incompatible with social solidarity between wage earners. Even the partial introduction of a so-called 'third' source of retirement benefit through pension funds, additional to the basic and supplementary benefits that exist at present, would pave the way for a 'cannibalization' of pay-as-you-go schemes by capitalization.

Savings from salary: the real problem

But that is not all there is to it. For there is another problem that needs to be directly addressed in contemporary capitalist societies, in which ninety per cent of the population are wage or salary earners. This is the ownership and management of the disposable 'savings from salary'. In earlier times, during the Keynesian or Fordist phase of capitalism, saving was something the non-wage-earning classes did. 'Wage-earners consume what they earn, and capitalists earn what they invest', as Kalecki put it. This dictum is now out of date. It no longer describes the situation in France or any other West European country today.

At the end of 1997, for the first time since reliable figures became available, the value of financial assets held by French households (in various forms—cash, securities, and so on) exceeded their material assets (essentially land and buildings): 15,900 billion against 14,790 billion francs. Their total assets, at 31,690 billion francs, were about four times GNP, and constituted 84 per cent of national wealth.¹² Stocks accounted for 5,200 billion; life insurance policies for 3,100 billion; contractual savings schemes (mortgages et al) for 1,600 billion; saving accounts in public banks (*livrets A*, etc.) for 800 billion; and 'savings as salary' in the true sense¹³ (profit-sharing schemes, share options, company savings plans,

¹¹ Something too easily done—although other aspects of the problem are covered well—in *L'Avenir de nos retraites au péril du libéralisme*.

¹² For all these figures, see *Insée Première*, no. 595, July 1998.

¹³ To avoid any ambiguity, one must distinguish clearly between what I call 'savings from salary' (that is, the total savings of employees) and what is usually called 'savings as salary' (in other words, savings as a supplement to salary).

and so on) for 260 billion. The distribution of these assets is, of course, yet more unequal even than that of incomes, calling for drastic fiscal reform.

Michel Aglietta properly addresses these aspects of contemporary capitalism. We can set aside here the dubious vocabulary to which he sometimes resorts—terms like ‘labour society’ and ‘heritage capitalism’. The actual question he raises is this: what forms of savings from salary should be encouraged if we want to preserve or enhance the rights of employees to participate as savers in the management of their financial assets, and to exercise the influence—in both workplace and society—that such large collective investment funds should give them? The obvious contexts for an answer are local development and small and medium enterprises, but others are the social economy and public service enterprises which have been partially privatized. Would not all of these permit experiments with management criteria other than simple financial profitability?

It should be clear enough that this issue—the mobilization and collective control of savings from salary—has no direct link with the question of whether retirement pensions ought to be based on capitalization, as in the US, or pay-as-you-go, as in France. Two separate problems exist, which it would be dangerous to try to solve at a single stroke by the introduction of funded pensions. On the one hand, there is the problem of financing retirement and the character of the right to a pension (whether by pay-as-you-go or by capitalization); on the other, the problem of financing economic development and of the ownership structure of productive enterprises (on which their management depends). In my view the second problem becomes more tractable—if still by no means easy—to resolve in the interests of employees, if the first is already settled on a pay-as-you-go basis that guarantees a pension at least equivalent to that in France today (about 70 per cent of salary at retirement). There is much to be done if we are to move in this direction, against the tide of decisions to date, not to speak of the recommendations of the Charpin Report.

But if pension schemes should give priority to the unity and solidarity of employees, this does not mean falling back on any narrow or immutable definition of the working population.¹⁴ To use Marx’s terminology, it is necessary to take at least as much interest in the side of the wage

contract that gives rise to the 'creation and accumulation of wealth' as to the side that ensures the 'reproduction of the labour force'. This calls for resolute interventions in the control and management of capital. Where an earlier 'collectivism' conceived the solution to be nationalization of the means of production at the level of 'society as a whole', what is needed today is a gradual and multiform process of socialization, whose first steps have yet to be taken. Robin Blackburn remarks that 'Marx was surely right to insist on the fact that the structure of social relations is crucially determined by what happens to the economic surplus'. Just so. He neglects, however, the determining prior question of how the economic surplus is produced in the first place. Nevertheless, his stimulating essay has the merit of drawing attention to some decisive aspects of contemporary capitalism.

⁴ See the contributions by J. P. Gaudillière, N. Murad and A. Lechevalier on B. Friot's book *Puissance du salariat: emploi et protection sociale à la française*, in *Mouvements*, 4, May-July 1999.

ROBIN BLACKBURN

REPLY TO HENRI JACOT

I AM GRATEFUL to Henri Jacot for his critical reflections on my proposals for pension reform. Pension funds are a form of capitalist property, albeit a rather strange one. It might seem to some socialists that such funds should simply be abolished and that there is therefore something paltry about a mere programme for their reform. I am therefore pleased that Jacot notes the radical nature of the package I recommend. It aims to create a quite new pension fund regime—one entirely distinct from that associated with pension funds as we know them today, whether in the UK, the US, Chile or the Netherlands. In these countries, and a widening circle of imitators, large tax breaks are given to pension funds and professional fund managers, subject to the narrowest commercial objectives, supplant both policy-holders and any wider notion of the public interest.

My proposals start from the recognition that pension funds represent a problematic and anomalous kind of property, which has great weight within the global capitalist order. Though he does not flatly deny their importance, Jacot may still underestimate it. He points out, for example, that in the United States those covered by personal or occupational schemes are a declining proportion of the workforce. This is true, but not because the absolute numbers of those covered by such schemes are in decline. The recent expansion of employment in the US has mainly swelled the ranks of temporary, part-time or short-term contract employees who do not qualify for occupational pensions and whose modest earnings do not furnish them with the resources to take out personal pension plans. The number of employees participating in occupational pension plans based on 'defined benefits' has dipped from slightly over to slightly under 40 million, while those in so-called 'defined contribution' or 'money purchase' schemes have risen from 40 to 45 million over

the last decade.¹ The total value of these funds has grown dramatically during the bull market of the nineties.

The 'defined benefit' type of pension, with its guaranteed link to salary levels, has fallen out of favour with employers, who have sought to replace such schemes with so-called 'defined contribution' or 'money purchase' pensions, which pay the contributor only what their 'pot' will buy as an annuity at retirement. The trend away from 'defined benefits' should probably be seen as a gain to employers, though it may also reflect the fact that the 'defined contribution' system is more adaptable to job mobility. But it remains the case that funded provision as a whole is hugely important. White collar and managerial strata do well out of such schemes, of course, but so do most public employees and union members. The majority of such workers are covered by occupational schemes and their trade unions would strongly resist any plan to wind them up. On the other hand proposals that gave policy-holders and their representatives a real say in the running of the schemes, and which rewarded funds which comply with wider social objectives, could be attractive to this constituency as well as to social movements.

In Britain, it is true, the widespread sale of individualized personal pension plans led one and a half million employees to become victims of a gigantic mis-selling scandal. This experience itself demonstrated the need for far-reaching reform. But note that the victims were those who had bought an individual plan, not those joining occupational schemes; indeed many had been tempted to desert the latter for the former. The bad personal schemes are bad because of the heavy administrative charges and marketing costs associated with them, and not because they invest in equities. The generality of occupational schemes also play the stock market.

Henri Jacot's comments are not entirely free from a paradox—or even self-contradiction—often displayed by left critics of proposals to extend funded pension provision. On the one hand, it is objected that funded provision is the preserve of the more privileged; on the other, it is argued that it would be wrong to bring the excluded into such arrangements, on the grounds that they are supposedly expensive and risky. While many schemes could indeed be improved, the holders of occupational pension

¹ *The Economist*, 27 November 1999.

funds of all types find them generally a good investment. Middle-class and professional people generally take good care to enrol themselves in such occupational pension schemes. This would be perverse behaviour if the idea of pensions invested in equities were really as dubious as their critics claim. Social movements, more reasonably, tend to object to specific investments but not to the very notion of investment as such.

As a socialist I look forward to a society in which stock markets no longer hold society in thrall. But so long as social relations are organized in a capitalist way then it is surely unlikely that holding stakes in capitalist private property will be ill-advised in a purely economic sense, as Jacot implies when he cites Greenspan's objections to ideas of investing public pension funds in Wall Street (Greenspan also, of course, complained that it would lead to political interference in the market).

If one is quite sure that socialism will already have arrived by the time one reaches retirement age, then there is no point in joining a pension scheme since, almost by definition, a socialist society will give decent pensions to all. But those confident of this have dwindled to insignificance. Paradoxically—and this time it is a paradox embraced by my own approach—it could well be that it is only when all employees acquire a collective stake in capitalist private property through retirement provision that they will find themselves probing the limits of capitalism as a social regime. What I envisage here is, of course, not a smooth escalator to social responsibility and justice, but a new type of social and class struggle over the nature of the regulations and institutions which define the regime of accumulation.

My argument in NLR 233 was framed by the observation that any hope of imposing a socially progressive logic on European monetary union would be lost without vigorous measures of macro-regulation, for which a new pensions regime would furnish a powerful lever (as Keynes pointed out in his essay on 'How to Pay for the War'). Soon afterwards, the fate of Oscar Lafontaine offered us a vivid illustration of the obstacles to such macro-management, and in part it is the climate of general drift since then that has led to lack of confidence in the euro. Events have already shown the dangers of neglecting a potential tool of macroeconomic regulation that is peculiarly adapted to conditions of globalization.

Instabilities

Jacot refers scathingly to the alarmist projections so often broadcast by advocates of pension privatization. In societies still afflicted by mass unemployment they try to make our flesh creep at the idea that there will not be enough workers to do the jobs available; while in countries with restrictive immigration codes they ignore the ease with which more generous policies towards immigrants could make up for any eventual shortfall. But such valid criticisms should not lead us to neglect the advantages of foresight and planning. Thus China should certainly ponder the implications of a future demographic structure in which the proportion of older people is rising steeply while that of younger people shrinks. Nearly everywhere, socially-regulated investment funds would help to reduce the burden of public debt on future generations while fostering a more progressive and sustainable pattern of economic growth.

In the West, a combination of demographic shift and commercialized pension provision could aggravate economic instability, in ways to which proponents of pension privatization are blind. For the rise of pension funds sets in motion tidal waves of cash flowing through them, with hugely distorting effects on share-prices. In one demographic phase a surplus of contributions over payments is likely to foster a stock-market bubble. But once baby-boomers begin reaching retirement age, fund managers will need to become net sellers to finance their pension commitments. Thus unless vigorous steps are taken to counter-act this automatism, demographic shocks will be fed through into the financial system, adding a further layer of instability to it. In my original article I cited the anxiety of an experienced former fund manager at this prospect.² More recently Jan Toporovski, studying the institutional basis of today's asset inflation, found that pension funds have contributed greatly to Ponzi dynamics in capital markets, which now abound in speculative constructions that resemble pyramid selling schemes.³ There is also now a considerable literature tracking the evidence of a clear link between demographics and stock market prices, mediated by pension funds. Thus Mosebach and Najand estimate that in February 1997, 65 per cent of all US full-time employees participated in a 401 (k) plan or its

² Malcolm Crawford, 'The Big Pensions Lie', *New Economy*, Spring 1997, pp. 38-44.

³ See Jan Toporovski, *The End of Finance: Capital Market Inflation, Financial Derivatives and Pension Fund Capitalism*, London 2000.

equivalent, and that this implied a total investment of some \$266 billion annually with penalties for any early withdrawal, a level at which there was a significant inflationary impact on share prices.⁴

Equities and bonds

While there is a strong case for pension funds investing in equities—a case that could be very strong in the aftermath of a crash—the current dearth of alternatives in the UK is pushing the fund managers to over-reliance on this type of asset, even on standard assumptions. Gerald Holtham, economic adviser to the Norwich Union, has lamented the scarcity of long-term public bonds and has proposed that the British government float a series of bonds maturing in 25 or 30 years to underwrite improvements in health and education.⁵ Billions of needed investment in the railway system could be raised in the same way, and such bonds could be sold at preferential rates to pension funds which were owned by their members, which gave formal representation to them, accepted social priorities, and held most of their assets for, say, at least five years. Naturally, such arrangements are not going to be contemplated by the Blair government. But it is enough to sketch them to see that social property could be used as a lightning rod to earth otherwise menacing storm clouds of speculative capital. The element of public subsidy would be designed to ensure that those funds shouldering the burden of social investment were not penalized by lower returns.

Jacot points to similarities between my proposals and those made by Michel Aglietta. I was happy to acknowledge a degree of overlap because I was well aware that my proposals could be thought naively to underestimate the systemic logic of capital. Thus so-called 'ethical' investment funds, which abstain from speculating in corporations which produce arms, or practice discriminatory hiring practices, or condone dangerous industrial processes, could still find themselves complicit in other social evils or even in these very same practices further down the supply chain. Or they could even find their initiatives counter-productive, simply

⁴ Michael Mosebach and Mohammed Najand, 'Are structural changes in mutual funds' investing driving the US stock market to its current level?', *Journal of Financial Research*, Fall 1999, p. 318.

⁵ Gerald Holtham, 'Why the government needs to borrow more, not less', *Guardian*, 16 August 1999. I have further thoughts on Britain in 'How to Restore Collectivism', *New Statesman*, 14 January 2000.

opening up opportunities for less scrupulous investors. What interested me in Aglietta's argument was that he thought it realistic to propose new principles which might structure the market as a whole while not being subordinate to its logic. As it happens, the measures I propose are more far-reaching than any actually specified by Aglietta and they are not bound, as perhaps his are, by an insistence that capitalist institutions are now impregnable and can only be restrained rather than replaced. The institutional innovations envisaged would be considerable, so I am likewise encouraged by the fact that an authority such as Peter Self has proposed that 'superannuation funds' should be made available for 'longer-term investments which would yield environmental benefits (such as more durable products or energy savings), or which would make a socially informed use of the many new and disturbing inventions (such as genetic engineering) which would otherwise be left to commercial exploitation.'⁶

I am glad that Henri Jacot noted my observation that any reform of pension funds aimed at making them engines of self-management should take heed of the experiences of each country and in particular of the different historic forms of its social achievements. It would be absurd to introduce Anglo-Saxon-style individualized pension plans to a country where they were unknown, only to reform towards a more collective model. One of the strengths of Meidner's famous plan for wage-earner funds was that it grew out of Swedish conditions. An interesting aspect of current debates in Venezuela about the role of pension funds is the way they are seen as appropriate vehicles for channelling the country's oil wealth into social reconstruction.⁷ It is usually not difficult to see how a funded approach to retirement provision can be used to strengthen existing public or social systems of administration. These issues are now sharply posed in France, where the employers have announced that they are withdrawing from a pension system they have jointly administered with the trade unions since 1945.⁸ The French trade unions will certainly wish to defend the gains represented by this system. But if the joint commissions had the backing of an accumulated social fund with

⁶ Peter Self, *Rolling Back the Market: Economic Dogma and Political Choice*, Basingstoke 2000, pp. 215–6.

⁷ For this, see Richard Gott, *In the Shadow of the Liberator* (forthcoming), Verso: London 2000.

⁸ For a laudatory report in the business press, see Robert Graham, 'An End to Patronage', *Financial Times*, 20 January 2000.

its own pattern of investments, this would surely strengthen their ability to withstand threats from the employers.

When faced with such direct challenges to today's pension provision, it may seem a luxury to dream up schemes for funds which will only deliver in the medium or long term. But actually the tying together of pension funds, social objectives and fiscal reforms has a logic that would help us not only to honour current pledges for retirement, but also to provide decent pensions to those, like many women, who do not qualify for even the supposedly 'universal' full state pensions because they lack the requisite contribution records. Obviously state pensions should be paid at proper rates—say at least 50 per cent of average earnings—to all those over 65 or 70, regardless of their contributions. But henceforth contributions should be placed in a special fund and not diverted, as is presently the case in both the UK and the US, to general government expenditure. Since such contributions would then count as savings they would leave room in the public finances for more generous treatment of today's pensioners; and while expanding current options, they would at the same time reduce claims on future streams of wealth from rentiers and capitalists. Thus flagging aspirations to redistribute income can be revived by redistributing capital. Jacot worries that this means neglecting the sphere of production. But what it actually means is recognizing, as Harry Shutt and Jim Stanford have argued so persuasively, that in an era of globalization the sphere of production is mortgaged to that of global finance.⁹ The implication is that without a socialization of investment mechanisms there can be no socialization of production.

⁹ See *The Trouble with Capitalism*, London 1998; and *Paper Boom*, Toronto 1999.

LUISA PASSERINI

DISCONTINUITY OF HISTORY AND DIASPORA OF LANGUAGES

Eve in the garden of Eden, after unnamng the animals Adam had named. 'I had only just realized how hard it would have been to explain myself'. Ursula LeGuin, *She Unnames Them*

TIMOTHY BEWES's review of my book *Europe in Love, Love in Europe* in NLR 236 has helped me to rethink some of the presuppositions and implications of my work, against a background of *ego-histoire*. I am grateful for this. Having been a pupil of Norberto Bobbio in my youth, and followed his work more or less consistently thereafter, I have learnt that no historian can avoid incorporating a philosophy of history, tacit or explicit, into their work. This philosophy can be unsystematic and eclectic, but it will inform the architecture and approach of the historian, and define what is considered historically significant.

Let me make explicit what is often, although not always, implicit in my own recent work. I willingly admit that it is guided by a belief in the discontinuity of history. For I am convinced that a primary task of the historian today is to avoid the exclusive pretensions to continuity of traditional narratives, which filled in all gaps and ignored everything that did not fit the writer's paradigm—without acknowledging its omissions. This kind of continuous narrative is still with us today. It purports to establish or explain sequences of events in terms dominated by politi-

cal and economic forces, while excluding aspects that matter a great deal—to some of us—such as subjectivity or daily life, and ‘subaltern’ figures such as women. Claims to continuity between present and past have often been the basis for ideological appropriation of terms and concepts, and the self-legitimation of the historian. A recent example is the presumption by some members of the French intellectual Right of an unbroken continuity of values from Aristotle to Maastricht. But even innovative and progressive historiography still often relies on traditional continuous narratives, which do justice neither to leaps in history, nor to the new domains and subjects studied by historians.

Discontinuities and temporalities

The idea of discontinuity of history means in the first place an alternation of repetitions, developments and sudden complete breaks. It is also a methodological safeguard of the distance between history and historiography—in other words, between the experience of humanity and the itineraries of the historian. I believe that in the writing of history the representation or *Darstellung* never reproduces the *Genesis* of the phenomena to be studied—a lesson learnt from Marx. Discontinuity further suggests the distance between the intentions of subjects and the outcomes of history, which notoriously proceeds by its bad side. It denotes, too, the coexistence of the times of the particular (as studied by micro-history) and of the general (macro-history). That the particular cannot be reduced to an example of the general is something most historians have yet to understand or accept. Finally, discontinuity indicates the dialectical way in which the same phenomenon may possess two opposite values and implications in the same period, of conservation and subversion—an example would be groups in the 1930s like *Ordre Nouveau* or *New Europe*. I have reached these conclusions from my practice as a historian, but also from my reading of philosophers of history such as Horkheimer or Benjamin.

Hence too the crucial importance, in my view, of psychoanalysis. Its findings—or more accurately, the findings of some Freudians, some Lacanians and some Jungians—enlarge and deepen the possible range of historical research. They remind us that many processes have semi-conscious or unconscious dimensions; that diachronic forms of development are marked by all kinds of associations and circularities; and that the link between historical events and processes is often not at all that of a

cause to an effect, but of a symptom to an 'illness'—that is, of a sign whose relation to what it hides or reveals is indirect and oblique. Similar presuppositions are, of course, shared by other disciplines such as semiotics—no wonder, since language is here the common focus of attention. In fact, it is strange that historians have so often forgotten that they deal largely with words and not immediately with facts. Acknowledgement of the unconscious dimensions of history involves not only a more complex view of issues of subjectivity, but also procedures of interpretation that try to find the hidden substrata of source-texts—the ground where psychoanalysis meets literary criticism. In this sense, the gaps, voids and discontinuities of history are also the risks that subjects take in attempting to become masters of their lives and times, or interpreters of them. The continuity of the subject is neither guaranteed nor given—it is a possibility that is always in question; and this element of risk should be reflected in a historical narrative. We need to take account of the silences and oblivions of history, its ironies as well its tragedies. Irony, like laughter, is a royal road to the unconscious.

Generational shift

It should be clear, then, that the task of the kind of historical writing to which I am committed is not to pursue—or construct—direct links between past and present, but to study traces of various kinds of the past with the utmost philological attention to them and their contexts, in search of strands which have gone unseen or ignored, or become forgotten. Our aim will be new visions of the past, founded certainly on primary and secondary sources, but likely to be at odds with current opinions of what is historically significant. It should also be plain why cultural processes are of such crucial interest. The shift of so many historians of my generation from social to cultural history—it includes myself—does not necessarily imply lack of interest in older questions, such as: what is a revolutionary subject, or how can we help it towards self-awareness and recognition. But it reformulates them drastically. The questions now become: what is subjectivity, as agency of decision and as inherited legacy? How do individuals and groups constitute such subjectivity and become constituted by it? What are the relations between subjectivity and change, and which were the points in history at which different choices could have been made—if we understand the past, in Croce's formula, as the history of freedom, which in my translation is another way of denying the absolute privilege of 'what actually happened'.

I thought that much of this was implicit in *Europe in Love*. Why did I not make it explicit? Partly because much of this is familiar, if not widely accepted, and partly because we still lack a collective understanding of the reasons why a generation of scholars on the Left moved from Marx to Bakhtin, from Sartre or de Beauvoir to Camus, from the instruments of political economy to the eclecticism of cultural studies, with its various methods and techniques, including textual analyses that owe much to structuralism. Reciprocal accusations of renegacy or pan-politicism bring no light to this problem. But reading Timothy Bewes I realize how extreme the diaspora of languages has become within what was once the Left, even the New Left. What we seem to face is a break-down of any common tradition or transmission of meanings between political generations. That suggests not only a multiplication of different intellectual languages, but great difficulty in translation between them.

Burckhardt and Hobsbawm

I say this, since Timothy Bewes at one point argues that I put 'the greatest possible distance between myself and the philosophy of history, the grandest, and malest, of historical approaches', yet at another taxes me with historicism—here, supposedly, a position outside history. He goes on to propose Burckhardt (puzzlingly cited from a secondary source) as an inspiration for my thinking about history and culture: Burckhardt, for whom the origins of European modernity lay not in Provençal culture but the Renaissance, who rejected the 'impressionism' of the Romantics, and insisted that historians must make moral judgement. As it happens, despite all this, I would not reject Burckhardt as an antecedent in every respect, since he did after all refuse to consider the present as the 'consummation of all times'. On the other hand, one historian I have taken as an inspiration is Eric Hobsbawm, whose attitude to the past Bewes counterposes to mine. *Si parva licet componere magnis*, I can say that while there is indeed a great gulf between my kind of exposition—deliberately fragmentary in *Europe in Love*: it does not (for example) offer any new interpretation of the Spanish Civil War—and Hobsbawm's, since he does construct the sort of continuous analytic narrative I was referring to, this should not obscure the fact that his work was very important in my own formation. I not only read his books, but translated one of them—the Italian edition of *Labouring Men*. Between such work and mine, or that of some of my contemporaries, I see the mixture of continuity and discontinuity that typically unites and divides different

intellectual generations. Changing forms of historical expression are an important aspect of such conflictual bonds.

Among dozens of examples of the lack of congruence between the meanings I attach to words, and those given them by Timothy Bewes, let me simply cite a few. I do not read the journal *New Age* as 'spiritualist'. I do not define Burckhardt as 'ahistoricist'. I do not advance a gendered distinction between a feminine Europe of life and a masculine Europe of death. I would never use phrases like 'purely historical', 'purely theoretical' or 'purely political', since they strike me as illusory and prejudicial. I deny that 'culture' in any of my books 'means poetry', although it certainly includes it—but what about psychoanalysis, which Bewes does not mention at all?—let alone that 'politics means Mosley and Hitler'. I will not attempt to refute any of this. I am simply pointing out radical differences in understanding between two well-intentioned subjects, cast in the respective roles of author and reviewer.

So far as 'historicism' goes, what I mean by this term is either the line of thought that connects Gramsci with Croce and Hegel, or that which runs from Ranke and Droysen to Dilthey and Meinecke. For Bewes, by contrast, historicism seems to indicate just a 'refusal to draw comparisons between the Europe of 1939 and that of 1999'. Once defined in this way, it easily turns into something called 'ahistoricism', that Bewes then equates with Eurocentrism. He forgets the attack by the *Annales* school—in some ways an inspiration for my work—on historicism and its characteristic forms of narrative; and ignores what is actually the defining feature of historicism, the assumption that any particular aspect of reality can always be subsumed under higher forms that place it within some vaster conception of reality as a whole. This procedure strikes me as the exact opposite of the charge Bewes lays against me in *Europe in Love*.

Bewes's alternative to 'historicism', as he understands it, would yoke together history and politics, past and present, subject and the object of discourse. We can see this from the way he often assumes that I share the views of those whom I study. Thus he can write: 'Blair shares Passerini's vision for the future of international relationships, as couched in the rhetoric of the New Europe Group. The NEG, she writes, preferred to "visualize Europe as a great political and cultural family".' It is a novelty for me to be suspected of taking the family as a model for anything.

Where we do agree factually, if from opposite judgements of value, is at the point when Timothy Bewes remarks that in the way I read my sources, 'there is no possibility of mobilizing them as any sort of solution to our own political malaise', for the stories I tell in *Europe in Love* 'seem to have no persuasive purpose, and are, in effect, required to be their own justification'. I would, indeed, never think of 'mobilizing' the individuals and groups I study in my historical work in the service of any solution for my own political malaise—which in some way I perhaps share with Timothy Bewes. I do not consider this to be a task of the historian. In fact, I see it as dangerously close to the *attualizzazione*—'updating'—of history by philosophy advocated by Giovanni Gentile, which inevitably leads to ahistorical, if not outright anti-historical, versions of the past.

Utopians and good Europeans

Bewes is therefore right that I accord no priority to current political concerns, such as might be posed by the Labour Party in Britain, in my historical work. Actually, I believe that a certain engagement in the cultural field is a way of contesting current forms of—especially European—politics, of keeping alive a memory of what politics might be, and a hope that something worthy of its name may reappear in other forms. In that sense, I can see no similarity—rather, the deepest of differences—between the 'lover's discourse' conceived by Roland Barthes, which I try to translate into historical terms, and the sentimental jargon of the media employed by the British Prime Minister. Barthes's discourse has nothing to do with the cult of life- (or death-) styles of pop stars. It is fragmented and solitary, and 'untimely' in a Nietzschean sense: unfashionable and possible only in the interstices of the existing order. It is not identical with the Provençal discourse of love, although it has a memory of it. It projects itself towards a possible future, that can at any step be check-mated. Frank Thompson, by the way, understood both. He had experienced a traditional form of impossible love, and expected in a future Europe to be able to find a different kind—a hope shared by some poets of the Spanish Civil War. Yes, this was utopian. But it was so not in the sense of a ready-made scheme projected onto the real world, but rather as a criticism of existing conditions springing from an intuition of changes potentially immanent in the present.

So too today, I see a great difference between the official rhetoric of humanitarian Europeanism espoused by our leaders, and my suggestion that we try to sketch an identification with Europe that passes through a critique of all forms of Eurocentrism. There is no space here to develop arguments I have set out elsewhere,¹ but let me indicate a few basic points. The generation of 1968 has begun, slowly and unsteadily, to move towards what I call a 'last identification' with Europe. The reasons for this are complex, but I believe they include the following:

- ▶ a discovery of the cultural dimensions of public action, beyond or apart from strictly political engagement, and a recovery, through works of cultural history, of the utopian dimensions of the idea of Europe, which were strong in the inter-war period, and then temporarily annihilated by the Second World War;
- ▶ a lasting attachment to internationalism, now aware of the need to move one step at a time in search of intermediate forms, between the sorts of belonging possible today, and a future horizon conjured up by that lovely metaphor, 'citizens of the world';
- ▶ a sense of reconciliation with the generation of the Resistance, and above all with its liberal-socialist wing, represented in Italy by Gobetti and the Rosselli brothers—a tradition with a very strong sense of European culture and identity (Communism, apart from a few slogans in Lenin and isolated Trotskyist currents, was never Europeanist).

In my own research, I seek to trace elements that have determined identity in Europe, in a recent or remote past, on the 'left' or the 'right', by reconstructing historically what people have believed it meant to be European. My intention is to pass through these determining elements and to abandon them, drawing awareness from them along the way, not as examples, but as terms of comparison. In this itinerary I am determined to give up continuity. It is impossible to derive a linear path from the Greeks to Maastricht without counter-productive violence to

¹ I take the liberty of referring to two essays of mine: 'The Last Identification: Why Some of Us Would Like to Call Ourselves Europeans and What We Mean by This', in *Europe and the Other and Europe as the Other*, edited by Bo Strath, Brussels 1999; and 'From the Ironies of Identity to the Identities of Irony', in *The Idea of Europe. The Politics of Identity from Antiquity to the European Union*, edited by Anthony Pagden, Cambridge forthcoming.

the record. It is better to think of Europe primarily as a space whose co ordinates have shifted in different directions in different periods, and in which there lies between one cultural phenomenon and another, or one historical idea and another (each to be understood as premisses, even if *ex negativo*, of our quest), a Kierkegaardian abyss and leap, both in the short and long run. What we find in our research are points punctuated by ruptures, contradicted by what is 'other' than themselves, without fixture.

In this respect, I would like to recall one of the thinkers who has most influenced my view of these questions. Nietzsche's ironic portrait of the 'good European'—wandering, clownish, unstable, without fatherland—still saw this figure as stumbling somewhere beyond the 'men of fatherland', obsessed by their own nations and nationalisms. It is such ambiguities a historian should respect. Rather than generating simple dichotomies, my hope is to propose new configurations and connexions. I will gladly put on my bill—if I may use an Italian phrase—the possibility of failing in this task.

So although I believe we must not understate the distances between historical and political discourses, this does not mean I wish to be distant from today's Europe and its wars. Incidentally, we cannot speak of the conflict in Kosovo as 'the first European war for fifty years', since wars have been raging in what was once Yugoslavia for ten years now. In these, I refuse to consider only Blair and not Milošević too as responsible for massacring fellow Europeans. Within the framework of an international women's organization against the censorship of women's voices, I have begun a project to collect the life-stories of women in Kosovo—from every group: Albanian, Montenegrin, Rom, Serbian—to help create an archive of their memories. What has struck me is how many of them, while they express scepticism or bitterness at the long immobilism of Europe towards their region, also give voice to a desire to be recognized as Europeans themselves, in a full sense. It is this desire—and not only the wars—that reminds us we are a long way from being 'all Europeans now'.

TIMOTHY BEWES

SQUEAMISHNESS AND SCHOLARLY RIGOUR

LUIA PASSERINI is committed to a method that looks at 'the silences and the oblivions of history' as closely as, or more closely than, the manifest continuities. Her response to my review of her book *Europe in Love, Love in Europe*, like the book itself, is fascinating and illuminating as much for what it omits as for what it states explicitly. The clarification that she offers of the methodological assumptions of her style of cultural history is very welcome, and I am glad to have this opportunity to respond to it. Passerini is an authentic and rigorous scholar; her theoretical consistency is unquestionable, as demonstrated in her reply above; and her refusal to wrench the subjects of her research violently out of context is irreproachable. Scholarly propriety is, in fact, the principal theme of her response; thus her 'puzzlement' at my quotation of Burckhardt from a secondary source should certainly be read as a polite reproach.

Less nuanced is the charge that I have ascribed to the author views held by the objects of her study. Interestingly, I am not the only reviewer of *Europe in Love* to have been criticized by Passerini for this.¹ Furthermore, she claims, I have ignored the importance to her work of psycho analysis, which enables, indeed obliges us to read historical phenomena less in terms of cause and effect than as symptoms of metaphorical 'illness'. Finally, she objects to my use of the terms 'historicism' and 'ahistoricism'—in particular, to my suggestion that her diligence in treating historical traces with 'the utmost philological attention to them *and their contexts*' is pursued with such excessive rigour that it leads, in effect, to ahistoricism, that is, to the presumption to speak from a position outside history. Such an idea, Passerini intimates, testifies to 'the break-

down of a common tradition' which, with characteristic generosity—or is it excessive historicism?—she attributes to the 'diaspora of languages' within different generations of the Left.

The term 'historicism', as is clear from her response, is indeed used by Passerini and myself in quite different senses. Raymond Williams distinguishes (at least) two usages: the first, positive, denotes 'a deliberate emphasis on variable historical conditions and contexts, through which all specific events must be interpreted'. This is the sense in which I have used it, in relation to cultural history in general and what I take to be Passerini's methodology in particular. The second, hostile sense, associated with Karl Popper's assault on Marx and Hegel, refers to 'forms of interpretation or prediction by "historical necessity" or the discovery of general "laws of historical development"'.² As Passerini notes, it is the opposite of this that I criticize in *Europe in Love*. Thus—*si parva licet* etc.—I am not at all sure that the 'discontinuities' between Passerini and myself, a generational break and/or different intellectual traditions, are as significant as she thinks they are.

The rationale for resuscitation

After all, Passerini virtually concedes that *Europe in Love* advances no explicit argument as such, adding that to 'mobilize' characters from history as political solutions in the present is potentially dangerous. I would agree that such caution is justified, as is her reluctance to condemn, with casual hindsight, the fascist sympathies of her subjects. What then is the role of the historian for Passerini? What, in particular, could be the rationale behind her scholarly interest in a collection of largely forgotten, often unattractive or even politically reprehensible figures? This is a question I posed in my original review, but the only answer Passerini offers here is entirely negative, no less so for its symptomatic use of the indefinite article: 'a primary task of any historian today' she writes, 'is to avoid the exclusive pretensions to continuity of traditional narratives'. The reason for resuscitating Mitrinovic et al., in other words, is nothing other than the fact of their current obscurity. Is it any wonder that review-

¹ See for example Robert Tombs's review of *Europe in Love, Love in Europe* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 August 1999, and the subsequent exchange between Passerini and Tombs, 22 October 1999 and 29 October 1999.

² Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London 1983, p. 147.

ers, desperate to locate a position in—or a point to—Passerini's project, have assumed that her vision for the future, unstated and implicit as her methodology requires it to be, might nevertheless have something to do with the views of the characters whom she champions in the book? The rediscovery and sympathetic portrait of the little known communist partisan Frank Thompson, executed in Bulgaria in 1944—the elder brother of the historian E. P. Thompson—is one of the real achievements of Passerini's book. With her refusal to harness Thompson for our times, however, one is led to conclude that the real object of her study is the fetishized methodology itself.

In this respect, I would argue, Passerini's anxious concern for methodological propriety verges on the squeamish. She is dismayed at the prospect of what Heidegger calls *Zuhandenheit*, literally 'readiness-to-hand', instrumentality, or (Lucien Goldmann's translation) *la manipulabilité*.³ Yet this revulsion, theoretically founded as it is, leads her towards an intellectual position disconcertingly similar to what is called, in non-academic circles, 'hedging'.

This is most apparent in the question of Passerini's 'antecedents'. She objects strongly to my comparison of her work to Burckhardt (a comparison which is heavily qualified in the original review), as well as to my contrast of her perspective with that of Eric Hobsbawm—yet she then goes on to qualify her own rejection of Burckhardt, on precisely the grounds that I compared them, and to distance herself from Hobsbawm, on precisely the grounds that I counterposed them! I cannot remember ever reading a sentence that hedges more than the following: 'between such work and mine, or that of some of my contemporaries, I see the mixture of continuity and discontinuity that typically unites and divides different intellectual generations.'

This is a point that was central to the concerns of my review. Passerini's book is an ideal object to read 'symptomatically'—as a text spooked by its own contemporaneity. She reacts with distaste when she is mentioned in the same sub-clause as Blair—yet her preferred 'lover's discourse, translated into historical terms', gives her, and us, no tools to think politically that are distinguishable from suspect official discourses. As

³ Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, London 1977, p. xviii.

Roland Barthes writes, 'the lover speaks in bundles of sentences but does not integrate these sentences on a higher level, into a work'.⁴ Passerini is faithful to this method of proceeding. The problem is simply the difficulty of invoking her fragmentary narratives in the developments of an accessible political position. That it is 'impossible to derive a linear path from the Greeks to Maastricht' is undeniable. But need this mean 'abandoning' every historical determination of European identity, leaping across an 'abyss' between all certainties? It seems a politically defeatist conclusion.

In her reply, Passerini mentions Nietzsche as another of her antecedents. Yet Nietzsche too, in his essay on history, warns us against a trap into which Passerini risks falling. An *excess* of the historical sense, he writes, 'makes its servants passive and retrospective; and almost the only time the sufferer from the fever of history becomes active is when this sense is in abeyance through momentary forgetfulness'.⁵ There comes a point, he says earlier in the same text, when 'the past has to be forgotten if one is not to become the gravedigger of the present'.⁶ For all its theoretical rigour, Passerini's work cannot bring itself to pronounce on the present, nor indeed on the past. Her parsimony, which refuses to 'generate dichotomies', ends up by underwriting the very world she wants to question, on the basis of possible 'new configurations and connexions'. Her decision to leave these implicit is a corollary of her method—for there are no new configurations to emerge out of the morbid solitude of the lover.

It may be, of course, that our disagreements can be put down, as Luisa Passerini seems to wish, to mistranslations, heterogeneous intellectual traditions or different, 'well-intentioned' subjectivities. The trouble with such a resolution is that, like the solitary lover's discourse, it remains unverifiable. Nevertheless, if my discussion of Luisa Passerini's work has been affected by any miscomprehension, or discrepancies of historical situation, I will happily pick up the bill.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard, Harmondsworth 1990, p. 7.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1983, p. 102.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Luc Boltanski & Ève Chiapello, *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme*
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SEBASTIAN BUDGEN

A NEW 'SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM'

Politically, France is moving at the governmental level in much the same direction as the rest of Western Europe. Behind official rhetoric, the Jospin regime has accelerated privatizations (more public assets have been sold off than under the Juppé government), take-overs and cuts in social spending. The establishment press, after mourning the fall of 'modernizing' Finance Minister Strauss-Kahn on corruption charges, welcomes the reassurances of his successor Sautet that there will be no change of course. As in Britain, the Right is paralysed by rancorous internal disputes, and the official political scene devoid of any effective opposition. Intellectually, however, neo-liberal hegemony is weaker than elsewhere. Open advocacy of *la pensée unique*—the homologue of Anglo-Saxon TINA—has now become rarer. A generalized sense of discontent, of impatient and puzzled indignation, has found expression in a range of publications that have found a mass market. Publishers continue to find, rather to their surprise, that books denouncing the free market, globalization, labour flexibility, poverty and inequality are best-sellers. These are not mild sedatives of the sort produced in Britain or America by Will Hutton or Robert Reich. *La Misère du monde*, edited by Pierre Bourdieu, has sold 80,000 copies; *L'Horreur économique* by Viviane Forrester 300,000; *L'Imposture économique* by Emmanuel Todd, 50,000; *Ah! Dieu que la guerre économique est jolie* by P. Labarde and B. Maris, 70,000. Serge Halimi's merciless attack on sycophancy in the media, *Les Nouveaux*

chiens de garde, has been another spectacular success. However powerful conformist reflexes remain—with rare exceptions, reactions to NATO's blitz in the Balkans were no advertisement for Gallic intellectual independence—the moral climate has moved some way from the enthusiastic self-abasement and all-out Americanization of the eighties.

The appearance of *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* by Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello is the most important event of the turn so far. This massive book is an astonishing combination—an ideological and cultural analysis, a socio-historical narrative, an essay in political economy, and a bold piece of engaged advocacy. Like two experienced rally drivers, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello take the reader on a dizzying theoretical tour of the past thirty years, at each point where one fears that they might skid off the road with a gross generalization or incautious formulation deftly turning the wheel with an astute qualification or a whole new level of conceptualization. The work has been widely perceived as likely to become a classic.

Boltanski—of the same generation as Bourdieu, with whom he was once associated—is a sociologist who first came to public prominence with the work he co-authored with Laurent Thévenot, *De la justification*, a sophisticated and sometimes abstruse study of the different intuitive notions of justice people bring to their encounters with the world of social relations and objects. Associated, via Thévenot, with economists concerned with the conventions of market exchange—criticized by some for 'harmonicism'—Boltanski confesses a primary debt to Albert Hirschman, to whom *Le Nouvel esprit* is dedicated. Chiapello, by contrast, is a young instructor at a business school, whose first book was on the relationship between artists and managers. An established sociologist and a youthful management theorist do not make an obvious couple for a ferocious critique of contemporary capitalism. But this is, among other things, what *Le Nouvel esprit* delivers.

Its starting point is a powerful statement of indignation and puzzlement. How has a new and virulent form of capitalism—they label it a 'connexionist' or 'network' variant—with an even more disastrous impact on the fabric of a common life than its predecessors, managed to install itself so smoothly and inconspicuously in France, without attracting either due critical attention or any organized resistance from forces of opposition, vigorous a generation ago, now reduced to irrelevancy or cheerleading? The answer to this question, Boltanski and Chiapello suggest, lies in the fate that overtook the different strands of the mass revolt against the Gaullist regime in May–June 1968. There have always been, they argue, four possible sources of indignation at the reality of capitalism: (i) a demand for *liberation*; (ii) a rejection of *inauthenticity*; (iii) a refusal of *egoism*; (iv) a response to *suffering*. Of these, the first pair found classic expression in bohemian milieux of the late nineteenth century: they call it the 'artistic critique'.

The second pair were centrally articulated by the traditional labour movement, and represent the 'social critique'.

These two forms of critique, Boltanski and Chiapello argue, have accompanied the history of capitalism from the start, linked both to the system and to each other in a range of ways, along a spectrum from intertwinement to antagonism. In France, 1968 and its aftermath saw a coalescence of the two critiques, as student uprisings in Paris triggered the largest general strike in world history. So strong was the challenge to the capitalist order, that at first it had to make substantial concessions to social demands, granting major improvements of pay and working conditions. Gradually, however, the social and the artistic rejections of capitalism started to come apart. The social critique became progressively weaker with the involution and decline of French communism, and the growing reluctance of French employers to yield any further ground without any return to order in the enterprises or any increase in dramatically falling levels of productivity. The artistic critique, on the other hand, carried by libertarian and ultra-left groups along with 'self-management' currents in the CFDT (the formerly Catholic trade-union confederation), flourished. The values of expressive creativity, fluid identity, autonomy and self-development were touted against the constraints of bureaucratic discipline, bourgeois hypocrisy and consumer conformity.

Capitalism, however, has always relied on critiques of the status quo to alert it to dangers in any untrammelled development of its current forms, and to discover the antidotes required to neutralize opposition to the system and increase the level of profitability within it. Ready to take advantage of even the most inhospitable conditions, firms began to reorganize the production process and wage contracts. Flexible labour systems, sub-contracting, team-working, multi-tasking and multi-skilling, 'flat' management—all the features of a so-called 'lean capitalism' or 'post-Fordism'—were the result. For Boltanski and Chiapello, these molecular changes were not simply reactions to a crisis of authority within the enterprise, and of profitability within the economy, although they were that too. They were also responses to demands implicit in the artistic critique of the system, incorporating them in ways compatible with accumulation, and disarming a potentially subversive challenge that had touched even a younger generation of managers who had imbibed elements of the 'spirit of 68'.

Capitalism is conceived here, in Weberian fashion, as a system driven by 'the need for the unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means', that is fundamentally absurd and amoral. Neither material incentives nor coercion are sufficient to activate the enormous number of people—most with very little chance of making a profit and with a very low level of responsibility—required to make the system work. What are needed are justifications that link personal gains from involvement to some notion of the common good. Conventional political beliefs—the material progress achieved under this order, its efficiency in meet-

ing human needs, the affinity between free markets and liberal democracy—are, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, too general and stable to motivate real adherence and engagement. What are needed instead are justifications that ring true on both the collective level—in accordance with some conception of justice or the common good—and the individual level. To be able truly to identify with the system, as managers—the primary target of these codes—have to do, two potentially contradictory longings have to be satisfied: a desire for *autonomy* (that is, exciting new prospects for self-realization and freedom) and for *security* (that is, durability and generational transmission of advantages gained).

The title of *Le Nouvel esprit* alludes, of course, to Weber's classic study of the Protestant ethic. Boltanski and Chiapello, however, argue that historically there have been three successive 'spirits of capitalism'. The first took shape in the nineteenth century. Its key figure was the Promethean bourgeois entrepreneur, a captain of industry with every capacity for risk, speculation and innovation—offset by determination to save, personal parsimony and austere attachment to the family. By the inter-war period, however, this model came to be felt as outmoded. Between 1930 and 1960, there emerged a new figure—the heroic director of the large, centralized, bureaucratic corporation. The dream of young planners became to change the world through long-term planning and rational organization, linking self-realization and security, as plotted by ascent through a fixed career structure, with the common interest of satisfying consumers and overcoming scarcity. In turn, the crisis of 1968 dealt a deathblow to this spirit of capitalism, discrediting its forms of justification as archaic and authoritarian fictions, with less and less bearing on reality (degrees no longer a guarantee of a stable career or pensionable future, etc.).

To mobilize sufficient human energies for it to survive and expand, the system now needed a third 'spirit'. This is the specific object of the enquiry Boltanski and Chiapello undertake, following the example of Sombart and Weber, through a comparative analysis of management texts from the 1960s and 1990s. These are prescriptive texts, that aim to inspire their target audience by demonstrating that the techniques they recommend are not only exciting and innovative, but also compatible—beyond mere profits—with the greater good. The contrast between the two periods is striking.

In the 1960s, management literature was constitutively troubled by the discontents of managers and the problems of running giant corporations. It offered to solve these by decentralization, meritocracy and limited autonomy for managers, without loss of overall control. Most feared was any survival of patriarchal or familial taints among employers (favouritism, nepotism, confusion of the personal and professional), that might compromise the rationality or objectivity of the management process as a whole. By contrast, the literature of the 1990s rejected anything that smacked of hierarchy or top-down control, as uneconomic in transaction costs and repugnant in moral overtones. The key tropes of such

texts now became the permanence of change and the ever-increasing intensity of international competition (the 'threat' of Asia or the Third World replacing the East-West conflict of the Cold War years), encapsulated together in the master-term of globalization. The central organizational figure of the contemporary world becomes the 'network'. Indeed, so rhizomatic has management literature become that Boltanski and Chiapello almost suggest, in mischievous mood, that Deleuze and his followers could be taken for management gurus rather than anti-establishment philosophers. The flexible network is presented as a distinct form between market and hierarchy, whose happy outcomes include *leanness* of the enterprises, *team-work* and *customer satisfaction*, and the *vision* of *leaders* or *coordinators* (no longer managers) who *inspire* and *mobilize* their *operatives* (rather than workers). The ideal capitalist unit is portrayed as a self-organized team that has externalized its costs onto sub-contractors and deals more in knowledge and information than in manpower or technical experience.

Charisma, vision, gifts of communication, intuition, mobility and generalism become the ideal traits of the new leaders—dressed-down, cool capitalists like Bill Gates or 'Ben and Jerry' (particular targets of the anger of the Seattle protestors), who refuse to surround themselves with the formal trappings of bureaucratic authority. For in the 'liberated enterprise', control has become internalized in each employee, who 'shares the dream' of the leader, and externalized in the customer ('the client is king') and the pressures of competition. Taylorist separation of design and execution is overcome by integrated tasks of quality control and equipment maintenance, enhancing personal experience and autonomy. 'Trust' becomes the general lubricant of a world virtually without bosses, where everyone can realize themselves by involvement in the ongoing 'project', and has a chance of becoming a 'visionary' of their own dreams.

The downside of this utopian vision is partially conceded by neo-management writers, who note that the freedoms of this new organization of labour come at the expense of the sense of security offered by the more fixed career paths of the second spirit of capitalism. As partial recompense, they sketch a life-pattern of involvement in successive projects that continuously improve one's 'employability' as a form of 'personal capital'. The brittleness of the new spirit of capitalism shows through here, as it does too in the inordinate importance accorded by this literature to questions of reputation—integrity, sincerity, loyalty and so on: gestures towards personalization that only too clearly hint at the risk of their abuse through deception and opportunism.

Boltanski and Chiapello proceed to outline a model of the new moral framework of this emergent order, whose ideal figure is a nomadic 'network-extender', light and mobile, tolerant of difference and ambivalence, realistic about people's desires, informal and friendly, with a less rigid relationship to property—for renting and not absolute ownership represents the future. By now it should be fairly clear how Boltanski and Chiapello connect the new spirit of capitalism with

the libertarian and romantic currents of the late 1960s. In however perverted a fashion, the challenge these threw down to *bourgeois society*, as traditionally conceived, have been rendered compatible with a new form of *capitalism*. In the process, the metaphor of the network, originally associated with crime and subversion, has been transformed into an icon of progress, upgraded by favourable discourses in philosophy and the social sciences (Kuhn, Deleuze, Braudel, Habermas, Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, among others) as well as in new material technologies of communication and transport.

Such ideological and cultural analyses are then interwoven with analysis of socio-economic transformations and political processes, in a panoramic synthesis far beyond the scope of Weber's originating essay. In chapters devoted to the balance of forces in the enterprise, that have seen a steep decline in an already far from strong French trade unionism, Boltanski and Chiapello insist on the central importance of a reality that mainstream sociology, not to speak of political science, now effaces: social classes. But in accounting for the changes in these years, the weight of their explanation rests neither on conscious collective strategy nor impersonal structural pressures—although they do give consideration to both—but rather on the cumulative effects of many molecular actions leading to unintended or perverse consequences. Thus, the radical critiques of trade unionism and shop-floor representation from the far left after 1968 in the longer run furnished ammunition for an employers' offensive that weakened any chance of resisting the new ways of organizing the labour process; while after the oil shock, and recession of 1974–75, interaction between 'enlightened' employers and sociologists of work helped to neutralize any challenge to managerial prerogatives from below.

In the late 1970s, while the *nouveaux philosophes* were tirading against the evils of Communism, a silent counter-revolution was at work, slowly reversing the balance of power on the shopfloor. This was the decisive phase for morphological changes in the enterprise. But the Socialist victory of 1981 in turn accelerated the process, as the Auroux laws of 1982–83, supposedly strengthening the unions by shifting wage-bargaining to plant level, actually helped the employers to weaken them, while *énarque* economists enforced competitive deflation and former *soixante-huitards* became business consultants. As the social critique of capitalism was abandoned to a discredited PCF by the rest of the Left, former radicals pressed what remained of the 'artistic critique' into the service of various employers' initiatives—naturally, in the name of 'transcending capitalism', but also, thereby, anti-capitalism.

This ideology, however ascendant, could not occupy the whole space of representations in such a polarized society. As classes disappeared from any respectable discourse, the theme of social exclusion emerged as a relatively innocuous substitute. Boltanski and Chiapello trace the way humanitarian impulses in turn

gave rise to new social movements that embody a 'hesitant and modest' revival of the social critique of capitalism: rank-and-file *coordinations* that have mounted a number of strikes in recent years; movements of the *sans*—those 'without' the necessities of modern life, lacking documents, homes, jobs; or the autonomous SUD unions. All these, they argue, are faithful reflections of their time. Far from reproducing the traditional structures or practices of the labour movement, they display a 'morphological homology' with the network form of capitalism: flexibility and focus on specific projects, punctual agreements around particular actions, heterogeneity of composition, indifference to the numbers or forms of membership, and so on.

What, then, are the political conclusions of the book? For Boltanski and Chiapello, the discourse of 'exclusion' is much too weak to offer a sustained basis of resistance to the system. What is needed instead is a new conception of exploitation, adequate to the connexionist world, that links the mobility of one actor to the immobility of another, as a new form of the extortion of surplus value. The result is, in their view, a proliferation of relations of exploitation: 'financial markets *versus* countries; financial markets *versus* firms; multinationals *versus* countries; large order-givers *versus* small sub-contractors; world experts *versus* enterprises; enterprises *versus* temporary employees; consumers *versus* enterprises.' It is along these ramifying lines that the social critique of capitalism is to be renewed. Nor should the artistic critique be surrendered to its latter-day complicity with the established order. Rising rates of anomic suicide and depression are symptoms of the contradictions and limitations of capitalism's endogenization of its critical other. The notion of authenticity, too often decried as a value (by thinkers like Bourdieu, Derrida or Deleuze), can and should be rescued from its commodification by the market, without reverting to conservatism. The new spirit of capitalism demands a new critical combination against it, capable of uniting demands for solidarity and justice with those for liberty and authenticity.

What criticisms are to be made of a work ending on this note? The case for the 'new spirit' itself suffers from a certain under-motivation of its primary materials. The sample of management texts used is relatively small, and does not distinguish between local and translated works, or discuss relative sales or penetration. More importantly, no strong evidence is advanced for the general influence of this literature in French society at large. It is quite possible to believe that it has had a powerful impact on executives, without accepting that workers—even in the new 'lean' enterprises—really imbibe much of this ethos. It is also true that *Le Nouvel esprit* lacks any comparative dimension. Deregulation of finance, flexibilization of production, globalization of trade and investment are, after all, not confined to France.

Boltanski and Chiapello pay virtually no attention to Anglophone debates on these matters. Since major structural changes in contemporary capitalism

have been international in range, one must wonder whether they do not over-estimate the weight of May 1968 and its aftermath in their causal account. The arrival of neo-liberalism in France was clearly over-determined in important ways by features of the local situation. But Boltanski and Chiapello can still be suspected of underplaying systemic pressures in favour of national and conjunctural variables. It would be interesting to know whether management texts since the mid-nineties (their sample is from 1989–94) continue to strike the same 'critical' note, or whether the pressures of global accumulation have led to more straightforwardly aggressive and war-like tropes.

Theoretically, Boltanski's previous work with Thévenot was sometimes welcomed as a salutary rejection of the sterile rhetoric of ideological exposure and denunciation supposedly represented by Bourdieu's school—a 'pragmatic turn', giving due weight to the beliefs and justifications of actors themselves, rather than consigning them to categories of false consciousness. Nourished by the best of communitarian philosophy—Walzer and Taylor—and by an 'embedded' microeconomics, this would be a new sociology capable of reconciling the interests of justice with the logic of the market. *Le Nouvel esprit* is clearly a more radical work than *De la justification*. But much of its theoretical apparatus remains continuous with the earlier book, without there ever being a satisfactory articulation between the two. What is common to them, however, is a conception of the state as a site of compromise—between different logics and norms—and thus of social constraint and regulation. It is this that allows Boltanski and Chiapello to focus so intensively on micro-displacements at the level of the enterprise, going behind the back of traditional corporatist arrangements or welfare institutions, and so to envisage a package of juridical reforms as the antidote to an unfettered development of network capitalism. The agents of such a programme, they suggest, might include high-level bureaucrats, executives and even enlightened capitalists. Here, clearly, is the limit of any such pragmatism, the point at which it deserts any sense of realism.

Dick Morris, *The New Prince*
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TOM MERTES

COUNSELLOR TO CLINTON

Few political operatives in the US enjoy a reputation as tawdry as Dick Morris, pioneer of the use of 'focus groups' for devising candidate platforms. Hired by Clinton mid-way through his first term to rescue his prospect of re-election, Morris devised 'triangulation' as the winning strategy to foil his likely opponent, Dole. Playing to Clinton's own instincts, he counselled him to jettison all pretence of commitment to a traditional Democratic agenda, even the watered-down version on which he had campaigned in 1992, and take over much of the substance of the Republican legislative programme instead. Calculating that two-fifths of all voters were in the 'independent middle' of the electorate, Morris targeted this centre, reckoning that by stealing the Republicans' clothes, Clinton would drive them further to the right in search of some still distinctive Presidential apparel.

He was well placed to urge this manoeuvre, as a long-time mercenary willing to serve either party, provided the fee was large enough. Most of his recent work had been for Republicans: Trent Lott, Senate leader from Mississippi, was a key client. In 1995-96 his message to his two patrons was to bury the hatchet. If Clinton and Lott would come together to crack down on crime, reform welfare, erode immigrant rights, devolve federal responsibilities and the like, Clinton could keep the White House and Lott continue to command Capitol Hill. Politics could be confined to narrow limits.

Morris's strategy gave Clinton the winning formula for the 1996 race, though massive doses of corrupt finance, extracted from donors all the way from New York or Chicago to Djakarta and Beijing, were a vital lubricant of victory. Morris himself, however, did not survive to enjoy its fruits. During the Democratic

Convention, it emerged that he had been in the habit of lolling in bed with a paid concubine while on the line to the President, and passing the phone across the pillow for her to savour important exchanges on domestic and state affairs. Evidently, prostitution was an attraction not to be confined to politics. The symbolism of the affair was too pointed, and Morris had to resign. The next year, he cashed his time under Clinton into a standard narrative of service with the President, *Behind the Oval Office*, complete with a lachrymose letter to his wife begging for forgiveness, and unctuous tributes to his master: 'The press has given me much credit for President Clinton's triumph in 1996. It will become obvious throughout this narrative that the mind behind the victory was that of President William Jefferson Clinton.'

At the same time, Morris took the opportunity, with feigned regret, to lace his tributes to Clinton's accomplishments with insinuations that all was not quite well in the White House. There was a 'Saturday Night Bill' whose conduct, albeit in private, was at odds with the regal 'Sunday Morning Bill' of public office. By bringing this into the open, Morris assured his readers, he was helping to save Clinton from himself. For whatever his peccadilloes, 'history will in time dig beneath the scandals and retrieve his record of achievement for the American people. What he has done to help the United States and its citizens is too sweeping and too profound to remain buried for all time.'

The New Prince—subtitled 'Machiavelli Updated for the 21st Century'—is a more ambitious work, presenting itself as a technical manual for power-holders or -seekers of any stripe in the United States. On the face of it, Morris might seem well placed for such a conceit. Could there be better credentials for it than a famously cynical lack of principle? Any reader coming to it with this expectation is going to be disappointed. The Florentine is way off as a model. This is not just because of the dissimilarity of positions. Machiavelli, writing *The Prince* in 1513 to win the favour of Lorenzo de Medici, was a powerless exile; the Medici had just returned to rule Florence, in an Italy beset with wars and civil wars. Morris has the ear of almost any political figure he wants to influence, in an America quiescent under a neo-liberal order. There is a more important difference than this, however. Far from displaying any ruthless or consistent cynicism about US politics, Morris's book is a litany of gurgling pieties about them—the antithesis of everything represented by *The Prince*. If one were to take Morris's conceit seriously, which is impossible to do, a closer forebear might be *le père* Joseph, Richelieu's henchman in diplomatic intrigue and domestic manoeuvre, whose Capuchin robes created the legend of the grey eminence, since he not only had real influence as confidant of the Cardinal, but was a devout man of the cloth. But there any analogy would break down: where the friar was legendary for his discretion, Morris cannot conceal his exhibitionism.

What is the good news *The New Prince* brings? American democracy has never been in better shape. Voters are well-informed and expert judges of public

affairs, skilled at discounting bias in the media and filtering out irrelevant issues. Their decisions are consistently superior to those of bureaucrats, ideologues, academics or journalists. The role of money in electoral politics is greatly exaggerated. 'Special interests' are paper tigers. Race no longer matters much. Images are over-done. Citizens respond not to negative campaigns but to positive messages. They do not want to hear about failures or scandals, but issues of substance. Successful candidates are those who offer bold hopes and high ideals, rather than mere appeals to economic self-interest. A warm-hearted morality is the best policy for winning or holding office.

Who could better embody these prescriptions than the President? At the beginning, admittedly—Morris notes—Clinton's Health Plan was an embarrassing debacle. But once he had learnt how to 'update Machiavelli', under his adviser's guidance, he proved a star performer. One legislative success followed another. Even his early setbacks were redeemed: 'The far-reaching reform Clinton failed to achieve in his 1994 health-care legislation happened incrementally through the private sector and through gradual expansion of health-care coverage to children.' We have seen an administration of remarkable domestic reforms, not to speak of rare diplomatic skills in the service of peace: 'President Clinton has been particularly successful in establishing a reputation for patience, empathy, reliability, resourcefulness, idealism, and subtle diplomacy in his repeated and usually successful interventions in global trouble spots', since he is 'able to make everyone feel he knows their pain, empathizes with their position, and secretly wants to do all he can to help them.' None more so than Iraqis, Tutsi, Chechens, Sudanese, Yugoslavs, Colombians.

In fact, in its recipes for success, Morris's manual aptly captures the character of Clinton's rule, with its combination of sanctimony and cynicism: the incumbent on his knees in prayer with the Reverend Jackson, or at the rostrum lecturing black teenagers on the evils of promiscuity, while taking hefty back-handers from the Riady family or Johnny Chung, and raining bombs on civilians in Baghdad or Khartoum to screen squalid perjuries at home. In this duality, Clinton is the New Prince in person. For Morris, too, cannot avoid letting cats out of the bag. The other side of his glutinous receipts for high office quickly shows through. The voter cannot be expected to focus on a political message longer than thirty seconds—for 'the competition for his attention is steep: the ham sandwich and the beer in the refrigerator'. But half a minute suffices to convey the substance of any issue. Television advertising is the life-blood of any modern democracy. News broadcasts, on the other hand, indeed reportage in the media of any kind, is a noxious irrelevance (perhaps still smarting from the role of the press in his downfall, Morris shows unconcealed animus against the Fourth Estate). Reporters are not under control; advertisements are. Candidates should remember when they speak to the media that 'the most important part of the story is the sound-bite. The rest of the statement can be boilerplate or detail.'

If coverage is unfavourable, its impact can be quashed by a happily chosen background for the speaker. For the viewer, what counts is the visual not the verbal. In short, the more flatteringly feel-good the rhetoric, the more contemptuously manipulative the reality.

Morris frames his advice in a grander scheme of political evolution. The US, he argues, is moving from a Madisonian republic of indirect representation to a Jeffersonian direct democracy. Jefferson's promise to destroy parties has come to fruition with the decline of stable alignments and the recession of ideology. California-style referenda are overtaking the functions of state assemblies. In his latest work, *Vote.com*, Morris expatiates on a vision of the future in which the Internet will create 'virtual town meetings' where citizens can log their desires and transmit their political will without the need for representative mediation at all. Today, focus groups signalling the mood of the US public are anticipations of this panglossian democracy. Morris's own website—for example—offers another step towards it. Internet politics will not be divisive. There are no longer any 'big issues'; prosperity has dissolved populist discontents. The politicians of the future will eschew doctrines: 'men of affairs who respond to each new situation with practical, specific ideas unfettered by ideological constructs increasingly dominate our political process.' Aspirants should ignore the prejudices of parties and embrace new issues; organizations will fall into line behind any candidate who 'polls' well with focus groups and so has garnered the other measure of viability—money.

What Morris is projecting is not, of course, Jeffersonian. For Jefferson, democracy was based on a virtuous yeomanry, with the intelligence to elect members of a 'natural aristocracy'. If any analogy were to be made between Clinton's style of politics and historic predecessors, the Jacksonian regime would be a little closer. Emotional appeals to the 'common man', castigations of entrenched power and promises of a new, less federal-centred style of government were staples of King Andrew's fare; as were kitchen cabinets of political hacks, manipulation of opinion, and double standards at all levels of operation. But, of course, Jacksonian politics was for better or worse aggressively populist—just what Morris would take off the agenda today, and of which Clintonian emollience is the opposite.

The 'historical' dimension of Morris's books is little more than a gesture, however. Here, as elsewhere, the contrast with previous political analysts who were also advisers is stark. Take the case of Kevin Phillips, who helped devise Nixon's strategy in 1968. Phillips based his advice on a complete mastery of demographic and electoral data at constituency level across the country. His statistical and historical analysis suggested that the Republicans could capture the Presidency by targeting Sunbelt states and appealing to law-and-order themes calculated to swing blue-collar workers out of the Democratic column. Phillips's meticulous regional and social reckoning was born out. After breaking with

Nixon, he went on to write hard-hitting accounts of class polarization in the Reagan era and studies of longer historical patterns in American politics, as an outsider to any establishment.

The complete vacuity of Morris's landscape, by comparison, is a telling sign of the times. No regional, social, sexual, or any other kind of complications are allowed to disturb the flow of bromides on the importance of national television or the need for uplifting messages. He never registers (although of course he knows) that the American electorate comes predominantly from upper and middle-income brackets: whoever does not or cannot cast a ballot does not exist in the world of *The New Prince*. Morris cannot even bring himself to concede that the economy matters much. Clinton has delivered endless prosperity, so citizens now have less divisive concerns. He ends *Vote.com* by announcing that 'the United States is the most democratic nation on earth', though less than half of the nation even makes it to the ballot box. This is a country with one of the lowest participation rates and highest-per-voter spending rates on earth. The United States is now more than ever the economic model to be taken as a paragon by the rest of the industrialized world. How long will it be before it becomes a political model for Schröder or Blair, Cardoso or Lagos? Morris at least, despite his disavowals, plainly sees some useful future for himself in America. Only one politician receives a more unconditional paean than Clinton in *The New Prince*. Who else but Albert Gore?

Ernst Jünger–Carl Schmitt, *Briefwechsel 1930–1983*
 Klett-Cotta: Stuttgart 1999, 78 DM
 893 pp, 3 608 93452 9

GOPAL BALAKRISHNAN

TWO ON THE MARBLE CLIFFS

The publication of the correspondence between Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger is an intellectual event of some moment. The letters collected in this volume span a full half century—from 1930, when the two first met in Berlin, to 1983, shortly before Schmitt died at the age of 97. Jünger survived him by over a decade, dying in 1998 at the age of 103. The care and skill with which this collection has been edited by Helmuth Kiesel makes it an impressive accomplishment: German literary scholarship at its best. Detailed notes and background information are provided on nearly every letter, ending with an authoritative afterword on the relationship between the two thinkers. In a handsome production, only an index is missing. The volume makes compelling reading. In range and level, it stands comparison with Benjamin's correspondence with Adorno or Scholem, or the thematically closer exchange between Leo Strauss and Alexander Kojève. The letters are usually more laconic, sometimes enigmatic, than such counterparts. But they are never dull or cumbersome. Schmitt and Jünger were in different ways masters of a German prose running against the grain of the language: terse, clear and elegant.

When the two men met in 1930, each enjoyed a distinctive eminence in Weimar intellectual life. Schmitt had risen from an obscure Catholic background in Westphalia to become one of Weimar's foremost legal authorities. But his wider reputation rested on a series of remarkable essays spanning a much broader range of themes: a political critique of German Romanticism; exploration of the theological background of Emergency Powers; portrait of the Roman Church as European bulwark against Bolshevism; diagnosis of the crisis of contemporary parliamentarism; and—not least—a theory of politics as a field

constitutively defined by the distinction between friend and foe. Oscillating between moderate republicanism and counter-revolutionary decisionism, his main political links were with the Catholic *Zentrum*.

Jünger at this stage enjoyed a more dramatic notoriety. From a somewhat more respectable, though by no means elevated, Protestant background (his father was a pharmacist), as an 18-year-old he ran away to enlist in the French Foreign Legion. Brought home from Africa, he fought for Germany during the First World War on the Western front with such distinction—he was wounded seven times—that he was awarded the highest Prussian medal for courage, *Pour le Mérite*. His celebration of modern warfare in a coldly burnished, clinically exact prose, *Im Stahlgewittern* (*In the Storm of Steel*) was an immediate best-seller in 1920. An active participant in the paramilitarism of the Freikorps, he won further renown with works portraying the life-world of front-line soldiers as the model for a totally mobilized society of war and work to come. As a writer, Jünger was closely associated with ideas of a 'conservative revolution'; after a brief flirtation with the NSDAP in the mid-twenties, he moved towards the circle of 'National Bolsheviks' around Ernst Niekißsch. His record was much more engaged with the far Right than was that of Schmitt. But in the vision of the latter's *Concept of the Political* he found reason to exalt. The correspondence opens with his salute to it, just after they became acquainted at Schmitt's initiative. 'You have invented a special technology of war: a mine that explodes silently. One sees as if by magic the ruins collapse; the destruction is over before it becomes audible.'

If the two were drawn together by similarities of style and outlook—both were adventurers, to some extent loners, in their respective milieux—their paths crossed over when the Nazis came to power. Schmitt, after spending the last years of the Republic as constitutional advisor and confidant to von Papen and Schleicher, and warning of the dangers of Nazism, rallied to the Third Reich and became a top figure in its legal establishment, under the protection of Goering. His adhesion to the regime, if it was certainly in part opportunistic—he was soon piling up honorary titles and strategic positions in a severely purged corps of academic jurisprudence—also answered to certain of his convictions. Hitler's regime seemed to offer a drastic solution to many of the problems of political order that Schmitt had posed so starkly in Weimar times.

Jünger, unexpectedly, took the opposite route. Initially an activist in the sub-culture of right-wing paramilitarism from which the Nazis had emerged, he later became detached from any organized movement, maintaining friendships not only on the Right but on the anarchist or deviant Left as a well, in a spirit closer to literary bohemia than political faction. When Hitler came to power in 1933, he retired from Berlin to the provinces, where he was viewed with some suspicion by the new authorities. In these conditions, letters between the two men necessarily became allusive. Behind them, however, were more forthright and

face-to-face political discussions. From the outset, Jünger warned Schmitt of any too close association with the new regime, whose inner circle he knew all too well. When Schmitt was offered a position on the Prussian State Council in 1933, Jünger advised him to leave the country and go to Serbia to live with his in-laws, as a scholar in voluntary exile, instead of accepting this poisoned chalice. In the following year, when Hitler staged the murderous Röehm purge and Schmitt publically defended the assassinations, Jünger told him he had committed political suicide and advised him to equip his domicile with machine-gun nests.

Two years later Schmitt was evicted from his niche in power, under a withering attack from the SS as a crypto-Catholic careerist who had no place in the regime. Confined to academic life again, he continued to be intellectually productive, with publications—on Hobbes; the structure of international relations; land and sea-power—which might help him recover the favour of the regime, without committing himself too expressly to its policies. Jünger, meanwhile, was writing his coded novel on tyranny, *Auf den Marmorklippen* (*On the Marble Cliffs*), published just before the war broke out in 1939. Shielded as a war hero by the Army High Command, he was awarded the Iron Cross for his part in the defeat of France, and posted to Paris as cultural attaché in the occupation regime. There, at the centre of literary and artistic life under the occupation, he knew Cocteau, Céline, Drieu la Rochelle, Brasillach, Sacha Guitry and many others; and in the autumn of 1941 arranged for Schmitt to be invited to speak at the German Institute, with a side-trip to Port-Royal on which the two exchanged reflections.

When the Officers' Plot struck in July 1944, narrowly failing to kill Hitler, the *Kommandantur* in Paris was deeply implicated, and leading generals shot. Jünger, aware of the plan to overthrow Hitler although not a participant, was lucky to escape into retirement. Schmitt, a close friend of civilian participants in the plot in Berlin, was not taken into their confidence. The two men ended the war in the humble capacity of air-raid wardens. After it, their fates diverged dramatically. Schmitt was arrested, jailed and interrogated for the better part of two years by American prosecutors, stripped of all academic positions, and released into ostracism—a forbidden figure in the Bonn Republic. Jünger, on the other hand, suffered no sanctions in the French Zone, and was soon publishing his Parisian Diaries to general acclaim. The next fifty years saw a brilliant second literary career, in which successive novels and essays established him as lucid ecological sage and counter-cultural anarchist, whose passing was a national event. The author who made his name by exalting the approximation of humans to machines became a writer calling for the protection of nature against humans—without great alterations of style; a unusual case in German, or perhaps any letters.

Schmitt was not without admirers in West Germany, and had back-door influence on the framing of the post-war constitution. But his reputation as

a former Nazi jurist was too lurid for him ever to be able to re-enter public life again. His bitterness at this exclusion found often venomous expression in his diaries, where his jealousy of contemporaries who had survived the collapse of the Third Reich without damage is unconcealed. Here he gave way to a resentment of Jünger that he generally mastered when writing to him. Their correspondence—always formal, even when cordial—aims at a more dispassionate level. Contemporary political developments come into view, but rarely in the form of direct theoretical generalization. The letters written under Nazism, which comprise about two-fifths of the whole, approximate to what Leo Strauss thematized as the art of writing esoteric criticism without oppositional intent, under tyrannies. Sharp differences of outlook between the two men are apparent here, that confound easy labelling.

The relationship between Schmitt and Jünger was based on an attempt to grasp and shape the often unfamiliar idioms of the other. Both were deeply dissatisfied with the intellectual traditions of German conservatism: it was this shared antipathy that in part gave them a preliminary rapport with each other. Jünger, not unaffected by Nietzsche or Spengler, had a more familiar background in this respect, but was willing to take his cues from Schmitt, who remained an inveterate enemy of the local intellectual scene. Schmitt guarded his prerogatives as a theoretical mentor, which Jünger calmly conceded to him from the beginning. This is all the more striking, in that the letters are conspicuous for their consistently aesthetic points of reference. Innumerable exchanges focus on points of agreement or dispute over the significance of a wide range of writers held in shared esteem.

One strand here is a search for authentic representations of evil, maps that emplot the brutal co-ordinates of existence in an era of total civil war. Hieronymous Bosch, Edgar Allen Poe and Herman Melville repeatedly come into consideration. Céline and Malraux figure as the latest representatives of the French moralist tradition, whose dispassionate literary pessimism is held superior to the German metaphysical variety of moralism and its obverse in Faustian amorism. In these discussions, the heterodox Catholic fanatic Léon Bloy looms large—Schmitt introducing him as an antidote to Jünger's Nietzschean understanding of nihilism. Schmitt's tacit objective seems to have been to keep the exchange focused on literary topics, where he might influence Jünger's development as a writer, while preserving the division of roles between them, in which he held the more political and philosophical ground. Here, however, it is Jünger who lets drop the most arresting historical observation, when he remarks that the tragedy of modern German history stemmed from the absence of a strong nationalist Left. The argument, initially made in conversation with Schmitt in 1930, that Germany's core historical problem was the absence of a local Trotsky had an unsettling effect on Schmitt, who for decades repeatedly recollected it.

This idea, of course, came from Jünger's association with the circle round Nieksch, a sign of his more experimental political outlook. Schmitt, on the other hand, always had a deeper intellectual grasp of the challenge to traditional conceptions of politics posed by Marxism, after the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution. A similar pattern can be seen in their respective attitudes toward liberalism. Schmitt, more deeply implicated with the criminal regime, paradoxically had a much better understanding of the strengths of classical liberals, expressing sympathy and admiration for figures like Constant and de Tocqueville. In a letter of 1934 he characteristically remarked that the most consequential liberal theorists—Hobbes and Constant, thinkers self-confessedly creatures of 'fear' and 'indolence', were cases in point—had a fundamentally illiberal vision of human nature. Traditions like these were not a reference for Jünger. Such differences, of course, were in part explicable in terms of intellectual interest and orientation.

They were also questions of temperament. From his Parisian vantage point, Jünger viewed the Nazi order with a frigid, caustic detachment. On occasion revulsion broke through, even to admission of his own role in helping to unleash an 'underworld of slave-drivers and murderers'. One of his most chilling letters reports a scene from hell—worthy, as he says, of Bosch—on the Russian front, seen from a cable-car while on duty in the Caucasus. But he gazed on moral condemnation and political resistance with the same general detachment. Fatalistically inclined to view Nazism as a force accelerating the nihilistic destruction of all Old European values, he would comfort himself with the belief that it might be clearing the ground for some transvaluation to come.

Common to Schmitt and Jünger, however, was a repression of the moral and political crisis of the time into metaphysical realms of parable and myth. As early as 1941, Schmitt was comparing himself to Benito Cereno, the Spanish captain of Melville's story, prisoner of a slave mutiny—whose image he made into the fable of his position under the Third Reich, after the war.

The cloak of legend as medium of estrangement and exoneration fell, inevitably, over the fate of the Jews. In the Weimar period, Jünger had for a time brushed close to radical anti-Semitism; Schmitt, on good terms with Jewish colleagues and pupils, had shown no interest in it. But when Hitler came to power, their positions reversed. Jünger expressed disdain for official racism, as a new Inquisition, while Schmitt moved to establish impeccable anti-Semitic credentials, organizing a campaign to root out Jewish influences in the legal world, though without convincing the SS. Driven back to the academic margin, he started for the first time to weave mythical motifs into his theoretical texts, taking Leviathan and Behemoth as Jewish monsters of sea and land in the Old Testament whose fateful after-life defined the direction and imagery of Hobbes's work. A giant pterodactyl of the air from Kabbalistic sources—'so powerful that an egg falling from its flight will shatter a thousand cedars of Lebanon'—appears

in the letters soon afterwards. Cruelty and destruction are the marks of this Judaic bestiary.

Neither man had much doubt that the war was lost for Germany by 1943. By the end, it is clear that both were aware of the Judeocide, and each sought to distance themselves from it—not for the sake of the Jews, however, but for those who persecuted them. In the maelstrom of the final months of the Third Reich—February 1945—Jünger recalled Flavius Josephus's account of 'the obstinacy of the Jews in the siege of Jerusalem'. Nazi attacks on the ethics of the New Testament had profited only those of the Old: the extermination of the Jews was setting their morality loose in the world at large. Schmitt replied with a quotation from Bruno Bauer: 'But in the end God created the Jews, and if we kill them all, we will suffer the same fate.' The idea could be seen as a deranged corollary of Schmitt's argument in Weimar times that if an enemy always defines the horizon of a political project, he must be respected as such, since any attempt to annihilate him will destroy the project itself, politically annihilating the annihilator.

The enormity of these responses, as an odious casuistry of absolution, needs no comment. After the war, the differing circumstances of the two writers separated them. Paradoxically, if the sincerity—or intensity—of Schmitt's anti-Semitism as a subjective conviction can be doubted under Nazism, it is clear that once he was driven from public life after 1947, he became an unbridled anti-Semite, as the notebooks posthumously published in *Glossarium* (1991) make clear, since he now blamed Jews, from America or elsewhere, for his humiliation and expulsion. Jünger, now well adapted to post-war conditions, had no time for such phobias.

This led to the sharpest clash of their fifty-year correspondence. When Schmitt complained of Jünger's favourable portrait of the Jews, thinly disguised as Parsees, in his novel *Heliopolis* (1949) Jünger immediately issued him a 'friendly warning'—'you know the neuralgic point well enough'. Schmitt's reply was furious. Jünger then reminded him of their disagreement after the Night of the Long Knives: 'I have a right to advise you in this matter, as I showed at the most fateful decision of your life—you will recall the night I left you in Friedrichstrasse, in my distress', he wrote. 'If you had followed my advice and example then, you would perhaps no longer be alive today, but you would have the right in the highest court to judge me. If I had followed your advice and example, today I would certainly not be alive, either physically, or otherwise.' *Capisco et obmutesco*, Schmitt replied tersely. But in his notebooks he gave vent to a boiling rage, with virulent comments on Jünger. It was seven months before they renewed contact again. After Schmitt's death, Jünger, though shaken by the revelation of Schmitt's animosity, did not hold it severely against him.

If Jünger comes out well from this episode, this was certainly in part a question of character—he had many qualities Schmitt lacked. But it was also a

symptom of the way events had treated them. By the 1950s, Jünger seemed to embody an image many Germans wanted of their lives under the Nazis: stoically performing the motions of duty, all the while living in internal exile. Schmitt, punished with post-war humiliation, when others—some with worse records—escaped unscathed, loomed by contrast as an uncomfortable reminder of the lost worlds of European fascism. It would be premature to think we have buried the legacy of either.

Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx*
 Fourth Estate: London 1999, £20 (hardback)
 431 pp, 1 85702 637 3

SUSAN WATKINS

THE NINE LIVES OF KARL MARX

For all his posthumous fame, Marx has so far defied any attempt to write a definitive version of his life. Each political period has found something different to say about him. It was the mud and mustard gas of World War One that spurred Franz Mehring to write the first biography in 1918. The work was dedicated to his fellow SDP members, Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin, whose friendship, Mehring wrote, 'has been an incalculable consolation to me at a time when blustering storms have swept away so many "manly and steadfast pioneers of socialism" like dry leaves in autumn winds.' The importance of Marx's life for Mehring—a witty and independent-minded Berlin editor and *bon vivant*—was political: a salutary message for the party that had so calamitously failed to oppose the war, in which 'lifelong followers of Marx, men who had brooded for three or even four decades over every comma in his writings' he wrote, 'failed utterly at an historical moment when for once they might and should have acted like Marx.'

David Ryazanov, born in Odessa in 1870, made his way to Europe at the age of 21 to visit the Russian Marxists in exile. Arrested at the frontier on his way home, he was sentenced to four years solitary confinement and hard labour under the Tsar but escaped again to Berlin in 1907, where he pored over the Marx-Engels letters and writings (bequeathed to the German SDP on Engels's death), becoming their expert archivist and eventually piecing together the miced nibbled pages of the Paris manuscripts of 1844. After the October revolution Ryazanov set up the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow and, taking issue with Mehring's freehand characterization, produced a joint biography of Marx and Engels. His work fused the two into an indivisible pair, embedding them firmly

within a patiently dogmatic exposition of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, the francophile Moselle valley and the Bremen cotton mills; it still retains the narrow intensity redolent of the nineteenth-century artisans groups. (Ryazanov himself was arrested on Stalin's orders and died in prison in 1938.)

Boris Nicolaevsky, born in the Northern Urals and seventeen years Ryazanov's junior, joined the revolutionary movement while he was still at school and got his Menshevik education in the Tsarist prisons. Director of the Historical Revolutionary Archive in Moscow from 1919 to 1921, he was imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and then expelled. In Berlin, he worked closely with the SDP through the Weimar years. The biography he co-wrote with Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *Karl Marx: Man and Fighter*, was written on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power. 'When Marx was asked what his idea of happiness was,' they wrote, 'his answer was, "to fight" . . . Our theme was dictated to us by the time in which we live. He who opposes Marxism today does not do so because, for instance, he denies the validity of Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall . . . The arena in which Marx is fought about today is in the factories, in the parliaments and at the barricades.'

Werner Blumenberg, the social-democrat son of a German pastor, coalminer, journalist and fighter in the underground anti-Nazi resistance (first in Germany and later in occupied Holland), was the first of Marx's biographers to publish, in 1962, Louise Kautsky's letter testifying that Marx had had a child with the family's housekeeper, Helene Demuth ('Heaven protect us from small-mindedness!'). In 1964 Heinz Monz brought out his portrait of Trier at the time of Marx's birth, a densely detailed social canvas of a small and ancient Catholic town locked in a catastrophic agricultural slump. In Yvonne Kapp's rich portrait of the London years (*Eleanor Marx, Volume One: Family Life*), Marx is the father, both a sheltering presence and a stormy, troubled one. David McLellan's 1973 *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* was the most punctilious of all as to dates and proper names, although the ultra-left complained of a bourgeois plot to send proto-Marxists to sleep. In *Karl Marx and World Literature*, published in 1976, S. S. Prawer attempted, if not exactly a biography, certainly a 'life'; but here, a chronological narrative of Marx's inner life, chronicling the engagement of his imagination with the world.

And now, for these post-communist and perhaps post-Marxist times, left-liberal *Guardian* columnist Francis Wheen presents an affable and readable new biography of Marx, whom he finds 'astoundingly topical', a prophet of globalization with 'much to teach us about political corruption, monopolization, alienation, inequality and global markets.' Following, perhaps, Mehring's ambition to be 'within the reach and comprehension of at least the most advanced workers', Wheen's text is laden with references to kiwi fruit, Monty Python, Haagen-Dazs, Pizza Hut, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bill Gates and MTV—daytime

television as the heart of a heartless world, as it were, *Oprah* the sigh of the oppressed.

Like others, he rehearses the childhood pranks, the student duels, the discovery of Hegel; the apprenticeship on the *Rheinische Zeitung* the meeting with Engels at the Café de la Régence; Brussels; the *Manifesto*, the year 1848; and then Soho, journalism, *Das Kapital*. Wheen has a fine feel for the energy of Marx's prose and quotes plenty of heaven-storming periods. He has dug up some entertaining anecdotes and memoirs from the early Cologne days, such as Heinzen's recollection of helping Marx back to his lodgings after several bottles of wine: 'He sat down astride a chair with his head leaning forward against the back and began to declaim in a strong singing tone which was half mournful and half mocking, "Poor lieutenant, poor lieutenant! Poor lieutenant, poor lieutenant!" This lament concerned a Prussian lieutenant whom he had "corrupted" by teaching him Hegelian philosophy.'

He gives a spirited account, too, of Marx's defence of press freedom in his first article for the *Rheinische Zeitung* published in May 1842:

Naturally he criticised the oppressive intolerance of Prussian absolutism and its lickspittles; this was brave enough, if unsurprising. But, with an exasperated cry of 'God save me from my friends!', he was even more scathing about the feeble-mindedness of the liberal opposition. Whereas the enemies of press freedom were driven by a pathological emotion which lent feeling and conviction to their absurd arguments, 'the defenders of the press in [the Rhine Province] Assembly have on the whole no real relation to what they are defending. They have never come to know freedom of the press as a vital need. For them, it is a matter of the head, in which the heart plays no part.' Quoting Goethe—who had said that a painter can succeed only with a type of feminine beauty that he has loved in at least one living being—Marx suggested that freedom of the press also has its beauty, which one must have loved in order to defend.

It is Marx the journalist to whom Wheen really responds, praising his eloquence, daring and originality, and defending him against the charge of 'intellectual bullying' in his polemics. 'Marx was no coward, tormenting only those who wouldn't retaliate: his choice of victims reveals a courageous recklessness which explains why he spent most of his adult life in exile and political isolation.' Wheen makes good use of Marx's 1850s journalism for the New York *Tribune*, quoting nimbly from polemics against Palmerston ('What he aims at is not the substance, but the mere appearance of success') that have more than one topical echo.

There are times ('praxis makes perfect') when Wheen goes a soundbite too far, or when his popularizations truly appal ('There was nothing wrong with Hegel that couldn't be cured by standing him on his head'). The metaphor of the dating agency ('opposites attract') is dismally inadequate for a discussion of dialectics and there is no excuse—nor even historical basis—for describing Jenny von Westphalen as 'a bit of posh'. But there is no doubt that this is a friendly

enough account of Marx—which leaves one wondering: should not a 'Marx for our times' be a little more critical than this? A little more questioning?

'To some periods of Marx's life we have given far more space than others,' declared Nicolaievsky and Maenchen-Helfen. 'Our standard was not mere length of time but the importance of events in Marx's life. The years of revolution in 1848–49 and those of the First International are two or three times as important as the rest.' Despite Wheen's interest in his journalism, Marx's year in Cologne as editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* at the height of the 1848 revolution gets only 12 out of his four hundred pages (the maverick russophobe Tory David Urquhart does almost as well). That stormy year is in fact one of the duller moments of Wheen's book, devoted largely to Engels's walking tour through the vineyards of France. There is not much here, either, of the sweep of nineteenth-century history that so enriched some of the earlier Lives—no wider panoramas of pre-Bismarckian Germany, the Brussels of *Villette* or Balzac's France. Wheen gives little sense of the world in which Marx was a combatant; and so little idea of whom he was fighting, or what for.

Wheen seems to have something of a blind spot about the political commitment that was the driving force of Marx's life. 'He steadfastly rejected the temptation to save himself in the peaceful harbour of some bourgeois career,' declares Mehring proudly, 'although he might have done so without dishonour.' Wheen seems to think this rather a pity. If only he had stuck to it, Marx 'could have made his name as the sharpest polemical journalist of the century,' he remarks wistfully.

Marx, then, with the politics left out. The one moment at which Wheen does pose a critical question is during his discussion of the *Communist Manifesto*. 'How could Marx be so wrong and yet so right?' Wheen goes on to answer this by discussing Marx's chess technique ('brilliant strategy, fragile tactics') and concludes by remarking that, at the end of the millennium, the *Manifesto* is still a best-seller (so that's all right). But tactics surely are irrelevant here: strategy is the whole point.

Marx's early biographers wrote out of urgent political necessity: Mehring to put some backbone into a party that had capitulated to the generals in the moment of need; Ryazanov to further the political education, as he saw it, of a class newly risen to power; Nicolaievsky to rally opposition to German Fascism. In more tranquil times, Prawer's book might stand for the cultural energies of the Marxist imagination, and Kapp's (though certainly not Kapp herself) for the Freudian and feminist questioning of Marx. McLellan's Marx is rather that of the liberal establishment, or perhaps of the social democratic bureaucracy: a museum figure, the fire extinguished. In this light, Wheen is more in the tradition of McLellan: his is a feel-good Marx, freed from history and political commitment, a floating bundle of good quotations; Marx with the heart taken out.

Mike Davis, *The Ecology of Fear*
 Metropolitan: New York 1999, \$14 (paperback)
 484pp, 0 37570 607 0

DOREEN MASSEY

ANGELENO ANOMALIES

Los Angeles is an exception among cities. Or, at least, we like to think of it as such. Its sprawling refusal to conform to Western notions of what a proper metropolis should be has generated continual debate amongst architects, planners and sociologists. Paradoxically, in one ethnocentric teleology, the urbanism that starts in Athens and Rome, and runs through Paris and New York, inevitably ends in Hollywood. (Quite where Beijing, Timbuktu or Tenochtitlan would fit into this scheme has never been very clear.) Los Angeles is a dream city of sunshine and mobility, and the infernal setting of every second disaster movie. It is also, of course, the home of an industry whose obsessive self-concern distorts its global image even more.

The Ecology of Fear—subtitled 'Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster'—weaves together maps and words, dreams and matter, the physical city and (some of) its social divisions, and above all its human inhabitants and its natural environment, in startling and luminous ways. The heated reactions of academics, journalists and real-estate agents to this book can be taken as back-handed tributes to its unsettling power. Beautifully written, it constantly offers disconcerting insights and associations. Early on, recalling the arrival of Anglo-American conquistadors in this Mediterranean ecology, Davis observes that 'in the most fundamental sense, language and cultural inheritance failed the newcomers. English terminology, specific to a humid climate, proved incapable of accurately capturing the dialectic of water and drought that shapes Mediterranean environments. By no stretch of the imagination, for example, is an *arroyo* merely a "glen".' The passage captures something of the strangeness of this land, as it must have appeared to each of those who entered it for the first time, but it also

points ahead to a larger claim: that the Los Angeles basin still remains opaque as a historico-natural phenomenon to Anglo paradigms of urbanism.

Thus in an already famous chapter entitled 'The Case for Letting Malibu Burn', Davis demonstrates the madness of building houses in a fragile, fire-prone zone of chapparal, and the further insanity of fire-fighting strategies calculated to intensify the inevitable conflagrations when they occur. The grim injustices of a city committed to boosting the property values of the super-affluent, regardless of fiscal cost, while tenements in inner-city barrios burn, come out in stark relief. But Davis does not offer a conventional picture of power and powerlessness. One of the most distinctive motifs in *The Ecology of Fear* is the way in which the elements, monstrously disfigured by nature-defying patterns of habitation, wreak their revenge on even the enclaves of the privileged. The dialectical retaliation of nature can visit well-nigh biblical retribution on human indifference.

The 'fear' of the book's title refers, before all else, to the interactions between the two, particularly in the border regions between them. These are zones which give rise to phantasms that transpose social categories onto nature and natural categories into society. The denizens of Malibu project the rolling flames that threaten their way of life into 'a new breed of terrorist', 'black gangs', vagrant hobos camping out in the canyons, and other anthropomorphic evils—even as, ironically, 'the burning hills [are] full of hundreds of present and former gang members: all risking their lives on state and county fire crews'. Mountain lions are denounced as 'serial killers', while gang members are cast as 'animals'.

But could such tales be told of other cities? Refreshingly, Davis does not seek to present Los Angeles as the *Bladerunner* future of urbanism in the twenty-first century. But at times he cannot resist a tendency to cast LA in exceptional or superlative terms. It is too often 'unique' or in various ways 'the most', with geographical categories finessed to sustain the claim. Thus the six-county Los Angeles region is 'unique in the Northern Hemisphere' for the intensity of interaction between humans, pets, and wild fauna; Los Angeles has the longest wild edge 'of any major non-tropical city'; while 'only Mexico City has more completely toxified its natural setting, and no other metropolis in the industrialized Northern Hemisphere continues to grow at such breakneck speed' (my italics).

Whatever the empirical validity of particular such claims, a more general phenomenon may be at work here—the US habit of calling a local sporting event 'The World Series'. For example, in 1971 the San Fernando earthquake killed 64 people, and in 1994 the Northridge earthquake 72; both were followed by hysterical dread of the terminal Big One, and 'literary and cinematic aftershocks'. But in September 1985, between these two, there was an earthquake in Mexico City with a death toll of about 10,000. Number of films made about it? None that I know of. While writing this review, BBC Radio News announced a number of times that there had been a small tremor outside Los Angeles; no-one had been killed. That same week, Mexican states from Veracruz through Hidalgo to

Guerrero were disappearing under floods and mudslides, with hundreds dead or injured, and thousands left homeless. No item on the news. Davis is of course aware of the power of the LA-based media to select and stage events. But while he meticulously excavates media-induced ecological amnesia, like the suppression of evidence of local tornadoes, his own tendency to overstate LA's exceptionalism as a site of disasters can succumb to a radical version of the same kind of metropolitan self-absorption.

In the last two chapters of the book ('The Literary Destruction of Los Angeles' and 'Beyond *Bladerunner*'), Davis explicitly addresses media representations of LA as Apocalyptic ground zero, and the different ways this has been overdone. Dismissing the predictive relevance of *Bladerunner* as a condensation of old preoccupations, Davis suggests that the LA of the future might be best understood using models from the Chicago sociology, but with fear of the social and natural unknown, over-determined by media-generated phantasms, as the decisive variable of settlement. Here Davis places racial panic at the centre of his analysis. Rightly so. But the underpinnings of his account seem to rely too much on a generalized 'terror of the other'. What is lacking—although one can find it in his earlier work *City of Quartz*—is an explanation of the conditions that reproduce these racisms. Davis underscores the significance of the transformation which LA underwent during the mid-seventies, when it went from being 'the most WASP-ish of large American cities' to being one of the most ethnically diverse and fractured conurbations in the industrialized world. But he tends here to simplify the mosaic of the city into a polarization between the Anglo rich and the ethnic poor. Other factors of tension and division are side-lined—gender, for example, is not attended to at all. Similarly, although class is certainly not ignored, one is left wondering whether the city contains no poor whites, or prosperous ethnic minorities.

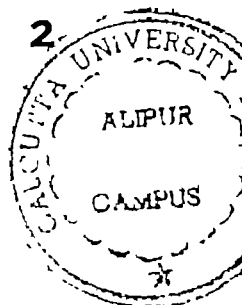
Immigration is, of course, one of the defining features of any 'world city', which no one would dispute Los Angeles to be. But if world cities really are global condensations of forces and relations of international scope, then writing about them should not remain local. Other analysts—Roger Keil in his pedestrian but informative volume *Los Angeles: globalization, urbanization and social struggles* (1998), for example—track the flows of incoming capital and labour to LA. One of the few times we go abroad with Mike Davis is to follow the routes of a plague—a strange wandering. This too is still the story of an arrival in Los Angeles. Global cities do gather many far-flung elements into themselves. But that is only one side of the story. They also throw out long tentacles beyond themselves. For extended relations of power run out from these centres. They are seats of control over considerable parts of the planet. Their pull on migrants can both devastate and save (through remittances) rural communities in other countries, hundreds and thousands of miles away. Their cultural exports can change those places too. Their environmental impacts may beggar the imagination.

At one point Davis criticizes Angeleno environmentalism of the seventies for its parochialism; yet his own call for a 'more subversive but necessary politics' typically stops short at local issues of urban design. The relationship of the city with the outside world remains to be explored. Yet this is a limitation that can be remedied elsewhere. Davis's tale of injustice and greed, natural and social disaster, tightly focussed within the city, urgently needed to be told. *The Ecology of Fear* has seized attention; provoked argument; brought new issues into the public sphere. A more moderate account might have passed without much notice. Who could ask more of a radical intervention?

NEW LEFT REVIEW 2

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PROGRAMME NOTES

LEO PANITCH: The New Imperial State

Globalization is the watchword of the moment. Does it mean the irresistible sway of markets over states—or are welfare regimes in Europe or dirigiste governments in East Asia still potentially robust? Neither, Leo Panitch argues: the reality is an unprecedented dominance of the United States over world capital flows and allied political systems alike.

PETER MAIR: Partyless Democracy

New Labour's rule in the UK is often held to offer a paradox: devolution of power to regions and cities, concentration of power in the central executive and support structures. Peter Mair suggests there is no contradiction—Blair's project is a 'consensual' system above politics, gutted of traditional parties.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK: Why We All Love to Hate Haider

What is the significance of the EU's boycott of the new Austrian government? Beyond the Tartuffery of official reactions to Haider in the West, Slavoj Žižek dissects the political function of the new rectitudes of the Third Way.

BENEDICT ANDERSON: The Rooster's Egg

The astonishing feat of a 23-year-old Filipino folklorist who took the newly invented discipline by storm under Spanish rule. What did patriotism mean for an Ilocano before modern nationalism; how many discrepant voices could an overseas enlightenment release?

TESSA MORRIS-SUZUKI: For and Against NGOs

Non-governmental organizations have taken over from social movements as candidates for progressive activism. Tessa Morris-Suzuki looks at the theory behind them, and the practice of their roles in Asia and Australia, with a view to a critical politics of the 'lived world'.

T. J. CLARK: Origins of the Present Crisis

Postmodernism is typically seen as a recent sequel to modernism. T. J. Clark queries Perry Anderson's account of the break between them, and concludes that there is more continuity of conditions than meets the eye. It may be too soon to judge whether modernism has passed.

MICHAEL MAAR: The Ordeals of Fire and Water

Reflections on the difference between reading a novel for the first and for the second time. Proust, Mann, Joyce, Kafka—how do they stand the two tests of a fervent discovery and a cool deconstruction, and what is the relationship between the two?

FRANCO MORETTI: *New York Times* Obituaries

What do the obituaries in Manhattan's leading daily tell us about the nervous system of America's liberal democracy? The filters and foibles of the success story as a grid for social memory.

JEFFREY ISAAC vs ALEX CALLINICOS: Anti-Capitalism?

Responding to Callinicos's critique of Giddens and Bourdieu, Jeffrey Isaac attacks the idea that it is possible to reject capitalism today. Alex Callinicos doubts that world history has thrown in its hand so quickly.

TABISH KHAIR: The Ideology of Play

Taking up John Roberts's account of the new Danish cinema, Tabish Khair argues that Von Trier's films share with Benigni's prize-puller rotations between the playful and the real, stock tropes of the postmodern.

BOOK REVIEWS

TARIQ ALI on John Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, and Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*. How the US fought its proxy war in Afghanistan, and what kind of Islamist regime has resulted.

HENRY ZHAO on Geremie Barmé, *In the Red*. The sweeping cultural changes of contemporary China, and the way intellectuals have reacted to them.

JOHN ARMITAGE on Paul Virilio, *La bombe informatique*. The latest projectile of France's radical theorist of speed.

GÖRAN THERBORN on Noel Parker, *Revolutions and History*, and Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*. Two new contributions to the literature on revolution—where does it stand today?

RUSSELL JACOBY on Guy Oakes and Arthur Vidich, *Collaboration, Reputation and Ethics in American Academic Life*. The relationship between Gerth and Mills in the retrospect of orthodox sociology.

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LEO PANITCH

THE NEW IMPERIAL STATE

To free markets from states: thus has neo-liberal ideology trumpeted the cause of the untrammelled financial speculation, export competition and capital accumulation that goes by the name of 'globalization'. Even more critical analysts have repeated the theme. 'The most convenient world for multinational corporations', Eric Hobsbawm wrote in *Age of Extremes*, 'is one populated by dwarf states or by no states at all.' Yet states, and above all the world's most powerful state, have played an active and often crucial role in making globalization happen. Increasingly, they are now encumbered with the responsibility of sustaining it. This was made dramatically clear in the wake of the East Asian financial crisis of 1998. As Robert Rubin and Lawrence Summers returned from Seoul, where they had been dictating policy to the new Korean government, the US Treasury and Federal Reserve interrupted their Christmas holidays to rope together the Japanese Finance Ministry, the Bundesbank and the Bank of England in coordinating private bank lending to Korea. 'We were all told, "Thou shalt not cut",' one managing director for global markets at an American bank in Hong Kong later admitted.² The *Wall Street Journal* also quoted a UK banker who put this 'rescue operation' in broader perspective: 'The sad fact is that international banks never accomplish much unless they are pushed by the US Treasury.' On 8 January 1998, shortly after Rubin's return from Seoul, the economist Rudi Dornbusch was quipping on CNBC that the 'positive side' of the financial crisis was that South Korea was 'now owned and operated by our Treasury'. This elicited a knowing chuckle from the other pundits: after all, it used to be the State Department or the Pentagon that ran the Korean franchise—not the Treasury.

As the contagion spread through 1998, neo-liberalism's usual misrepresentations of powerless states overwhelmed by unstoppable market forces grew increasingly untenable. The world was treated to the fascinating sight of the New York Stock Exchange *going up* on the news that the Japanese Government had nationalized one of the world's biggest banks (the Long-Term Credit Bank), and then to the spectacle of New York Federal Reserve officials summoning the CEOs of Wall Street's leading firms and telling them they would not be allowed to leave the room until they had agreed to take over the insolvent hedge fund, Long Term Capital Management (something of a misnomer for a financial institution engaged in short term arbitrage). This was hardly a case of globalization freeing markets from states. But then, there is nothing like a crisis to clarify things. Nine months later, amidst the aftershocks of the Russian default, with the Brazilian economy swaying on the brink, the principals on the world's capital markets seemed more dependent on, and certainly more attuned to, the latest word from the monetary authorities in Washington than Soviet managers could ever have been to Gosplan. As Alan Greenspan and the Federal Reserve fine-tuned the lowering of interest rates, opening the way for the newly-formed European Central Bank to do the same, it grew perfectly clear just how inconvenient it would be for capitalists if the world really was populated by 'dwarf states or no states at all'.

None of this was new; nor was it confined to dramatic, lender-of-last-resort interventions of the kind presaged in the 1980s Third World debt crisis, the Savings and Loan bailout, the 1987 stock market crash and the 1994 Mexican crisis. The deregulation policies that set globalization on its way not only involved a host of new rules allowing free markets to operate; they also increased the scope for political leadership and discretionary intervention by central banks and finance ministries—a necessary step, given the (constantly) chaotic and (intermittently) crisis-prone nature of free markets. A new systemic relation between the state and capital had indeed emerged; but it was not one that diminished the role of states—and least of all the American state. Neo-liberalism as ideology occluded our view of this; but it must also be said that most of the critics of neo-liberalism, adopting the same impoverished state-market categories but inverting the values attached to them, did nothing

¹ London 1996, p. 281.

² *Wall Street Journal*, 4 November 1998.

to help. Lamenting the 'eclipse' of the state by the market, they have restricted their contributions to extolling the success of 'strong states' in East Asia or Northern Europe in contrast to the 'statelessness' of the Anglo-American model, somehow hoping that by pointing to Japan or Germany they could prove neo-liberalism wrong. The problem with this response was not just that most of the 'state-led' models were dubious as progressive alternatives to globalization; nor that most writers in this vein were remarkably blind to the tensions and contradictions that were undermining these models, and making them increasingly vulnerable to global pressures. The greater problem was the very notion that these were 'strong' states, in comparison to a 'weak' American one.

The desire to counter neo-liberalism by strengthening states vis-à-vis markets is in some ways understandable; it reflects the hope that votes rather than dollars might determine the choices that govern our lives. But what has resulted is a remarkable idealization of the state as the repository of community values and societal needs. 'Embeddedness' has become the new cant word: as long as markets are 'embedded in society', they can be prudent and efficient and just. Vague as their models may sometimes have been, the 'market socialists' of the 1980s at least had some idea of 'embedding' markets in egalitarian social relations. Today the notion has more to do with measures of capitalist state regulation and expenditure. This unproblematic identification of the state with the interests of 'society' is the hallmark of a newly flourishing variant of Left-Hegelian idealism. Contradictory class interests are swept away by the invocation of an active state, which can simultaneously serve capital (making the penetration of markets more effective), upgrade education and welfare as social infrastructures of 'progressive competitiveness', and forge a 'synergistic' alliance with 'civil society'.³ Again, nothing new. The notion of the 'activist state' now fulfils what Ernst Bloch once identified as one of the key functions of ideology—'the premature harmonization of social contradictions' within existing social relations. More than it likes to admit, this critique of neo-liberalism has much in common with the cynical idealism of the Third Way and the World Bank's current project of building a 'post-Washington Consensus'—globalization with a social-democratic face.

³ See Peter Evans, 'The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalization', *World Politics* 50, October 1997; and Linda Weiss, *The Myth of the Powerless State*, Ithaca 1998.

The static duality of the categories of state and market, which so many would-be opponents of neo-liberalism accept without reservation, is a barrier to understanding the political economy of neo-liberalism. In retrospect it is now clearer than ever that the abandonment of attempts to develop Marxist theories of the capitalist state in favour of notions of state autonomy was a disastrous diversion. As one international finance expert put it at the recent American Political Science Association conference in Atlanta: 'In 1980, even Marxists thought an instrumental account of the capitalist state was not sophisticated enough, and by 1990 no one took any sort of Marxist theory of the capitalist state seriously at all. But what are we to say today when Goldman-Sachs controls the American Treasury?' However refreshing from such a source, this reversion to vulgar notions of 'the executive committee of the bourgeoisie', even if much closer to reality than new Hegelian notions of the state as a repository of community values, will not do. Globalization has rendered the role and nature of the state more complex—if still transparently capitalist. Where, then, should we begin?

The legacy of Poulantzas

Nicos Poulantzas's work on 'internationalization and the nation state', written in the early 1970s, still stands as the most fruitful point of departure.⁴ Against 'the ideology of "globalization"' Poulantzas insisted that it was wrong to think of globalization as an abstract economic process in which social formations and states are seen 'merely as a concretization and spatialization of the "moments" of this process'. Such formulations, which inevitably took the state to have 'lost its powers' to multinational capital, were 'fundamentally incorrect'. Poulantzas's outstanding contribution was to explain: (i) that when multinational capital penetrates a host social formation, it arrives not merely as abstract 'direct foreign investment', but as a transformative social force within the country; (ii) that the interaction of foreign capital with domestic capital leads to the dissolution of the national bourgeoisie as a coherent concentration of class interests; (iii) but far from losing importance, the host state actually becomes responsible for taking charge of the complex relations of international capital to the domestic bourgeoisie, in the context of class

⁴ Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London 1975. See also Konstantine Tsoukalas, 'Globalization and the Executive Committee', *The Socialist Register* 1998.

struggles and political and ideological forms which remain distinctively national even as they express themselves within a world conjuncture.

These elements still provide the conceptual building blocks we need to develop a theory of globalization. But I have abstracted them, as Poulantzas did not, from the actual states and specific conflicts and conjunctures that compose the world in the era of globalization. In developing his critique of the ideology of globalization, Poulantzas was above all concerned to trace the contours of a new epoch of American global dominance, entailing a new type of non-territorial imperialism, implanted and maintained not through direct rule by the metropolis, nor even through political subordination of a neo-colonial type, but rather through the 'induced reproduction of the form of the dominant imperialist power within each national formation and its state.' Transcending the restrictive confines of earlier Marxist theories of imperialism,⁵ Poulantzas understood that, in and through the crisis of the Bretton Woods system and American defeat in Vietnam, a new era of imperialism was being born.⁶

What Poulantzas could see was that the 1970s shock to US domination was only relative to the exceptional form that American hegemony had been able to assume in the context of post-war recovery. In sharp contrast to those who perceived a decline in US power and the rise of dynamic new capitalisms in Germany and Japan as the matrix of what would become globalization,⁷ Poulantzas brilliantly discerned that:

relations between the imperialist metropolises themselves are now being organized in terms of a structure of domination and dependence *within the imperialist chain*. The United States hegemony is not analogous to that of one metropolis over the others in the previous phases, and it does not differ from this in a merely 'quantitative' way. Rather it has been achieved by establishing relations of production characteristic of American monopoly capitalism and its domination *inside the other metropolises* . . . it similarly

⁵ For these, see the classic analysis of Giovanni Arrighi, *The Geometry of Imperialism*, London 1983.

⁶ For other insightful studies of the new imperialism at the time, see Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*, New York 1969, and James O'Connor, *The Corporations and the State*, New York 1974.

⁷ From Ernest Mandel in the late 1960s to Robert Brenner in the late 1990s: see Mandel, *Europe versus America?*, London 1971, and Brenner, 'The Economics of Global Turbulence', *NLR* 229, May-June 1998.

implies the extended reproduction within them of the ideological and political conditions for this development of American imperialism.⁸

'Relations of production' should be interpreted in the fullest sense here, as Poulantzas surely intended them to be. With that proviso, this striking vision of the relationship between American imperial dominance and globalization—however shaky it may have looked at various points to those who narrowly limited their focus to the relative competitiveness of the domestic American economy—stands confirmed at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Poulantzas's concern to demonstrate that globalization *did not mean* 'the virtual disappearance of national state power' led him to focus on the modalities of the induced reproduction of hegemony within the European states; this meant, as Susanne de Brunhoff pointed out at the time, that 'what was happening in the United States' was largely left out.⁹ Poulantzas considered American capital primarily in terms of its effects on European states and social formations, and did not examine in any detail the forces within the American economy that were impelling foreign direct investment in Europe, or the contradictions this represented for US capitalism. Even more crucially, he failed to consider the articulations of US imperialism in the apparatuses of the American state itself, and the international institutions it commanded.

After Bretton Woods

Poulantzas was writing at what we can now see as the turning-point between the epoch of Bretton Woods and that of globalization—a time when increased inter-capitalist competition, rampant inflation, falling rates of profit and spreading speculation against the dollar were conjoined with a worldwide upsurge against American imperialism, while the core capitalist countries themselves were shaken not only by waves of industrial militancy, but by the eruption of youth and black protests on the streets, as the war in Indochina became a US disaster.¹⁰ Alongside

⁸ *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 47. Italics added.

⁹ *The State, Capital and Economic Policy*, London 1978, pp. 113–122.

¹⁰ In his concern to show that the underlying cause of the long downturn cannot have been any significant impact of industrial militancy on labour costs, Robert Brenner takes too narrow and economic a measure of class struggle and so misses this crucial turning point in his 'Economics of Global Turbulence'.

the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, radical anti-capitalist schemes for democratizing the economy—including controls on multinational corporations and foreign investment, planning agreements with leading firms and unions, nationalization of banks and extension of exchange and capital controls—appeared on the agenda of even social-democratic parties, while the United Nations enacted a Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States giving member nations the right to ‘regulate and exercise authority over foreign investment’ and to ‘regulate and supervise the activities of multinational corporations’. The Charter explicitly permitted states to ‘nationalize, expropriate or transfer ownership of foreign property’.

But this was also a conjuncture in which the growing power of international finance, above all on Wall Street, was already straining against the prophylactic regulations of the New Deal and Bretton Woods regimes. It had been a naive illusion of the crafters of the post-war system that the goals of expanding international trade, restoring currency convertibility and fostering foreign direct investment could be realized without the eventual resurgence of financial capital. US banks followed American multinationals to Europe, and the overseas operations of their international branches soon constituted their most profitable fields of investment. The capital controls the US had imposed in the 1960s to cope with payments deficits were easily circumvented, with the collaboration of the US monetary authorities themselves.²¹ As the Bretton Woods system crumbled, the growing power of financial capital would have to be accommodated in the construction of a new global regime. A group of officials who had come into the Nixon White House in the late 1960s, armed with Milton Friedman’s theories and close ties to Wall Street, played a key role in its arrival.²² They believed, as the Trilateral Commission put it at the time, that it was essential to prevent governments being ‘overloaded’ by popular demands. But this did not mean that states were to be cashiered. Rather they had to be transformed from welfare systems into regimes designed to facilitate and police the free flow of capital around the globe.

²¹ See J. Hawley, *Dollars and Borders*, London 1987.

²² See Eric Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance*, Ithaca 1994, pp. III–120.

Britain provided the first and crucial test of a confrontation between radical-democratic and finance-capital solutions to the crisis. In 1974 a combined strike by miners and engineering workers had brought about a virtual state of emergency, culminating in the fall of Edward Heath's Conservative government. The Labour Party was returned to office, with a Chancellor of the Exchequer who had boasted he would 'squeeze the rich until their pips squeaked'. Financial markets reacted to the new administration with a ferocious assault on sterling. Within two years, Healey was forced to petition the IMF for credits to stop the run on the currency.

The British crisis

The conditionality attached by the IMF to the British loan of 1976 was a momentous break with Bretton Woods protocol.³ For it amounted to nothing less than the imposition of financial capital's long-standing preference for price stability and private investment as the pre-eminent goals of economic policy, upon a major Western state whose people had just voted for public expenditure and full employment. Key actors in this drama were William Simon, the American Secretary of the Treasury; his Undersecretary, Edwin Yeo; and Scott Pardee, Vice-President of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. In the last days of the IMF negotiations, Simon flew to London to meet secretly with Bank of England and UK Treasury officials and get their appraisal of where the Labour Cabinet stood. To maintain clandestinity, the meeting took place at an exclusive London tailor's and cost Simon the price of three suits—well worth it, he said.⁴ Simon had made his first million as a bond trader before he was thirty; Undersecretary Yeo was a former Pittsburgh banker. The connexions between Wall Street and the City of London undoubtedly smoothed their path. But it was only in their capacity as American *state officials* that Simon and Yeo could play the role they did in defeating the radical

³ Although the US Treasury had gradually forced conditionality on IMF loans to Third World states through the fifties and sixties, this was the first time—at least since 1947–50, when the Marshall Plan was tied to policies of social and financial discipline—that conditionality was imposed on a leading American ally: see Andrew Glyn, 'The Rise and Fall of the Golden Age', in S. Marglin and J. Schor, eds, *The Golden Age of Capitalism*, Oxford 1990.

⁴ See M. Harmon, *The British Labour Government and the 1976 IMF Crisis*, London 1997, pp. 193–5.

economic alternative advanced by Tony Benn and others in the Labour Party.

It was not easy. Edwin Yeo later described how the Treasury had 'sweated blood' to get its way, not least against Henry Kissinger and the State Department who favoured gentler handling of such a key Cold War ally. As William Rodgers, Simon's successor at the Treasury, later put it: 'We all had a feeling it could come apart in a quite serious way . . . it was a choice between Britain remaining in the liberal financial system of the West as opposed to a radical change of course. I think if that had happened the whole system would have begun to fall apart. So we tended to see it in cosmic terms.'¹⁵ So, too, in the end, did the Labour Cabinet, who fell to dismantling Britain's capital controls and welfare state with such a will that for the first few years of her government Thatcher could claim she was only following Labour's policies. The Labour Government were not only managing the British crisis as they did this: they explicitly saw themselves as junior partners with the US in managing the international crisis, through policies to accelerate the free flow of capital—actively helping to establish, as Poulantzas had put it, 'relations of production characteristic of American monopoly capitalism' within their own metropolis. Once it had worked in Britain, this process gave the signal for the new era of imperial neo-liberalism that came to be known as the 'Washington Consensus'.

Reorganizing hegemony

The 'regime' theories dominant in the field of international relations are manifestly unhelpful in understanding this development, misrepresenting as cooperative understandings what were in reality structural manifestations of a hierarchically organized international political economy.¹⁶ The same can be said of theories of state autonomy, which make light of all the manifest historical evidence of the growing political dominance of business ideas and pressures within both national states and the world economy over the last twenty five years. It is here that we can appreciate Poulantzas's accomplishment. His framework allowed him to discern, as few others were able to do, the American capacity to manage

¹⁵ Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, London 1997, p. 126.

¹⁶ Harmon, *The British Labour Government and the 1976 IMF Crisis*, p. 228.

the radical restructuring of global capitalism in forms that reproduced their imperial dominance. He perceived clearly what the series of successive European 'withdrawals' on capital controls, monetary policy and the oil crisis in the early 1970s meant:

There is no solution to this crisis, as the European bourgeoisies themselves are perfectly aware, by these bourgeoisies attacking American capital. The question for them, faced with the rising struggles of the popular masses in Europe itself, is rather to reorganize a hegemony that they still accept, taking account of the reactivation and intensification of inter-imperialist contradictions. American capital has no need to re-establish its hegemony, for it has never lost it.¹⁷

There is no space here to attempt even a summary historical overview of the reorganization of the terms of hegemony and the rules of the new capitalist order that has taken place since Poulantzas wrote these words. Peter Gowan's brilliant account of what he calls 'Washington's Faustian Bid for Global Dominance', covering the whole period from Nixon to Clinton, certainly confirms Poulantzas's view.¹⁸ Yet in concentrating almost exclusively on American strategy, it is arguable that Gowan reverses Poulantzas's omission, since he leaves aside any detailed examination of the determination of policy changes within the European states themselves, tacitly playing down the extent to which these were negotiated rather than dictated. American strategies can be invested with too much coherence and political actors with too much clarity and foresight. This is not to say that Gowan presents the evolution of policy as an entirely smooth or linear process; his discussion of the resistance of US banks to recycling petrodollars in the 1970s shows that he does not. What is missing, however, is the kind of full scale analysis that Comor has undertaken of how contradictory domestic class interests intertwine with the divergent goals of Defence and Treasury in the arena of US foreign policy, and its projection through the international mediators of US hegemony like the IMF, World Bank, WTO and so on.¹⁹

Both studies strongly confirm, however, that the process of globalization, far from dwarfing states, has been constituted through and even by them. The removal of controls on cross-border financial flows, the

¹⁷ *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, p. 87.

¹⁸ Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble*, London 1999.

¹⁹ See Edward Comor, *Communications, Commerce and Power*, London 1998.

'Big Bang' which broke down internal barriers within financial markets, massive privatization of public assets and deregulation in other spheres—all this was accomplished through state action, requiring a legalization and juridification of new relations among economic agents in both domestic and international arenas. This is what Stephen Vogel appropriately calls *Freer Markets, More Rules* in a detailed comparative study of regulatory reform in telecommunication and finance in Britain and Japan—confirming Michael Moran's argument in his neglected but pathbreaking work on *The Politics of the Financial Services Revolution*.²⁰ Likewise, the liberalization of financial markets has not involved any abdication by states of their supervision of banks. On the contrary, as Ethan Kapstein remarks, states have promoted 'an array of cooperative arrangements . . . including, since 1974, the founding of a bank supervisors' committee by the Group of Ten countries; the convening of annual meetings and "summer schools" of bank regulators; and the articulation of internationally accepted principles and rules of banking supervision.' The effect of this cooperation has been to promote policy convergence, but the actual supervision 'rests on the bedrock of home country control . . . states look to one another, as opposed to some supranational or multilateral entity, to legislate and enforce any agreements that have been collectively reached . . . As a result, the linkages between states and their national banks have not been broken, and in some respects they have even been strengthened.'²¹

This conclusion may no longer obtain within the European Union. But it still holds for the international system as a whole. There the principle of state supervision has not merely been conserved, but possibly even strengthened in the wake of the East Asian crisis, as a glance at US Treasury reports—nominally issued by the G22—on the need for a 'new financial architecture' suggests. Precisely because the principle of national control still obtains, the central concern of the US state has increasingly been to secure what Saskia Sassen appropriately calls the Americanization not only of international but also domestic legal standards for regulating financial systems and reporting information.²² Cross-border commercial arbitration and credit-rating services constitute informal regimes that are already substantially Americanized; while

²⁰ Published respectively in Ithaca 1996, and New York 1991.

²¹ *Governing the Global Economy*, Cambridge, Mass. 1994, p. 20.

²² *Losing Control: Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, New York 1996, p. 18.

the point of the 'new financial architecture' is to make each nation's accounting and bankruptcy laws into facsimiles of the American. There is, again, nothing new in this. It has been the dynamic of all the international treaty-making endeavours of the last twenty years, whose main thrust has been to ensure that foreign capital enjoys as favourable a set of arrangements as domestic capital within each state. A continual series of bilateral negotiations—1,513 bilateral trade agreements were reached in 1997, one every 2.5 days—are directed to the same end. In the year when the Multilateral Accord on Investment was finally halted, there were no fewer than 151 changes in the regulations governing foreign direct investment in 76 countries and 89% of them were favourable to foreign capital.²³ These, then, are the legal indicators of the 'induced reproduction' of imperialism in our time.

The new imperialism

It is therefore all the more surprising that there have been so few attempts explicitly to theorize the new imperialism since Poulantzas wrote about it in the mid-1970s. Susan Strange, who did try to do so, attributed this absence to the myth of dwindling US hegemony in the aftermath of Vietnam, Watergate and the Iranian Revolution:

The decline of US hegemony is a myth—powerful, no doubt, but still a myth. In every important respect the United States still has the predominant power to shape frameworks and thus to influence outcomes. This implies that it can draw the limits within which others choose from a restricted list of options, the restrictions being in large part a result of US decisions . . . The academics of the 1980s have been living in the past and figuring out theories of hegemonic stability to account for the public mood of the late 1970s. This is not, however, the first time that social scientists have behaved like generals who, overtaken by events, make elaborate preparations to fight the last war.²⁴

Another reason for the myth, especially strong on the left, was the relatively poor competitive performance of the US economy in the 1980s. Strange's response was to point out that the structural power of the US could not be measured by American exports or GNP alone:

²³ See World Bank Report, *Global Economic Prospects*, Washington 1998.

²⁴ 'Towards a Theory of Transnational Empire', in E-O. Czempiel and J. Rosenau, eds, *Global Changes and Theoretical Challenges*, Lexington 1989, p. 169.

TNCs based in the United States, plus TNCs based elsewhere but having a large part of their profit making operations in the United States, play a dominant role. Any TNC, whatever its nationality, that hopes to keep a substantial share of the world market now finds it indispensable to operate in the territorial United States. The political authority, therefore, that most TNC executives are likely to heed the most and be most anxious to avoid offending is that based in Washington.

When to this 'structural power' in the domain of production was added the global predominance of the US in the realms of finance, war, information and culture Strange could not avoid the conclusion that:

What is emerging therefore is a non-territorial empire with its imperial capital in Washington, D.C. Where imperial capitals used to draw courtiers from outlying provinces, Washington draws lobbyists from outlying enterprises, outlying minority groups, and globally organized pressure groups . . . As in Rome, citizenship is not limited to a master race and the empire contains a mix of citizens with full legal and political rights, semicitizens and noncitizens like Rome's slave population. Many of the semicitizens walk the street of Rio or of Bonn, of London or Madrid, shoulder to shoulder with the noncitizens; no one can necessarily tell them apart by color or race or even dress. The semicitizens of the empire are many and widespread. They live for the most part in the great cities of the noncommunist world. They include many people employed by the large transnational corporations operating in the transnational production structure and serving, as they are all very well aware, a global market. They include the people employed in transnational banks. They often include members of the 'national' armed forces, those that are trained, armed by, and dependent on the armed forces of the United States. They include many academics in medicine, natural sciences, and social studies like management and economics who look to U.S. professional associations and to U.S. universities as the peer group in whose eyes they wish to shine and to excel. They include people in the press and media for whom U.S. technology and U.S. examples have shown the way, changing established organizations and institutions.²⁵

Strange's approach differed fundamentally from that of Poulantzas, above all in its attribution of autonomous power to the state, and its conviction that this power was centralized rather than diffused. She also claimed—although it is difficult not to feel she was dissembling—that her goal was to improve, maintain and prolong American hegemony rather than destroy it. But we should nevertheless be grateful for her contribution to naming the beast.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

On the Right

The word imperialism is out of fashion, as Peter Gowan has noted.²⁶ So much so on the Left, that we now have to look to the Right for clear-sighted guidance. Zbigniew Brzezinski's recent book *The Grand Chessboard* makes no secret of 'the unique position [of] the first and only truly global superpower' whose 'vassals and tributaries' include the states of Western Europe. 'For the first time ever', he writes, 'a non-Eurasian power has emerged not only as the key arbiter of Eurasian power relations but also as the world's paramount power.' Rather more convincing than Strange in his desire to improve, maintain and prolong the empire, Madeleine Albright's tutor proposes that 'the three great imperatives of geopolitical strategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.'²⁷

Harold Innis once said (and if we Canadians don't know, who does?) that American imperialism has been made plausible by the insistence that it is not imperialistic. That persists in the rhetoric of the American state today. Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers, head of the most powerful state agency in the world, calls the United States the 'first nonimperialist superpower'. Boosters outside the ranks of officialdom can afford to be franker. Summers's intimate Thomas Friedman, lead columnist for the *New York Times*, strikes a more forthright note. Emblazoned on the cover of the paper's *Magazine* for 26 March 1999 is a massive clenched fist painted with the American flag, to illustrate his title article: 'What The World Needs Now: For globalization to work, America can't be afraid to act like the almighty superpower that it is.' There are some partisans of the empire, however, lucid enough to see that this prospect is not always viewed in the same light. As Samuel Huntington puts it:

In the past few years the United States has, among other things, attempted or been perceived as attempting more or less unilaterally to do the following: pressure other countries to adopt American values and practices regarding human rights and democracy; prevent other countries from acquiring military capabilities that could counter American conventional

²⁶ Employing the term in debate with John Lloyd over the imposition of 'shock therapy' on post-Communist Eastern Europe. See 'Eastern Europe, Western Power and Neo-Liberalism', *NLR* 216, March–April 1996.

²⁷ *The Grand Chessboard*, New York 1997, p. 40.

superiority; enforce American law extraterritorially in other societies; grade countries according to their adherence to American standards on human rights, drugs, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, missile proliferation, and now religious freedom; apply sanctions against countries that do not meet American standards on these issues; promote American corporate interests under the slogans of free trade and open markets; shape World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies to serve those same corporate interests; intervene in local conflicts in which it has relatively little direct interest; bludgeon other countries to adopt economic policies and social policies that will benefit American economic interests; promote American arms sales abroad while attempting to prevent comparable sales by other countries; force out one U.N. secretary-general and dictate the appointment of his successor; expand NATO initially to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic and no one else; undertake military action against Iraq and later maintain harsh economic sanctions against the regime; and categorize certain countries as 'rogue states,' excluding them from global institutions because they refuse to kowtow to American wishes.²⁸

Huntington believes all this comes from acting as though we live in a unipolar world, which it certainly will not be in the twenty-first century. He fears that unilateral behaviour by the United States, already widely seen as a 'rogue' rather than 'benevolent' superpower, could provoke not only Russia and China but even the states of Europe into an anti-American coalition. To avert this danger, America should show itself in a more benign light, acting less like a 'lonely sheriff,' and above all tending its alliance with Europe:

while the United States cannot create a unipolar world, it is in the US interests to take advantage of its position as the only superpower in the existing international order and to use its resources to elicit cooperation from other countries to deal with global issues in ways that satisfy American interests ... Healthy cooperation with Europe is the prime antidote for the loneliness of American superpowerdom.

Samuel Huntington meets Tony Blair. It looks as if we are moving into a new phase of globalization, as the dominant ideological discourse shifts from the forthright prescriptions of universal monetarism to the more 'caring' rhetoric of the Third Way. During the fall of 1998, the adhesion of the IMF—and behind it, of the US Treasury—to neo-liberal principles was the object of widespread criticism and derision from hard-boiled

²⁸ Samuel Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower', *Foreign Affairs*, 78:2, 1999, p. 48.

champions of orthodoxy like Paul Krugman and Jeffrey Sachs, and even financial speculators like George Soros. Establishment journalists suddenly started listening to political scientists working for the World Bank, trained as experts in particular regions and more aware of dangers on the ground than IMF economists, dedicated only to regression equations and abstract neo-classical theory, who would apply the same structural adjustment formulae to every crisis. The IMF's neo-liberal prescriptions, it could now be heard from the most improbable quarters, not only cause great misery, they don't even work. The case for capital controls, a few years ago voiced only by few 'other-worldly' Marxists,²⁹ received some surprising endorsements.

The language of the 'new financial architecture' and the creation of the G22 reflect the tactical manoeuvres of Clintonite diplomacy and functionaries at the World Bank. They bespeak little substantive change in policy. Capital controls are off the agenda—much too powerful is 'the systematic opposition of key constituents at home as well as the US Treasury and its allies abroad.'³⁰ These are the forces that have the upper hand. They know perfectly well that controls would have to go further than recent converts are prepared to admit if they were to be at all effective in taming the chaos that is international finance today—and if they go that far, who could say they would not be used for socialist rather than capitalist purposes? There are still a few people who, taking European social democracy more seriously than they should, have predicted 'a coming battle over capital controls' between Europe and the United States.³¹ They could not be more mistaken. Poulantzas's insight into the penetration of the European states by US imperialism still holds. The measure of it is the eager collaboration of every EU state with the latest assertion of American strategic hegemony over Europe—NATO's war on Yugoslavia. Those who focus on minor regional trade and currency rivalries can't see the bombs for the bananas.

²⁹ See the important essay by Jim Crotty and Gerald Epstein, 'In Defense of Capital Controls', *The Socialist Register*, 1996.

³⁰ B. J. Cohen, 'Capital Controls: Why Do Governments Hesitate?', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, September 1999.

³¹ Robert Wade, 'The Coming Fight over Capital Flows', *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1998–9.

PETER MAIR

PARTYLESS DEMOCRACY

Solving the Paradox of New Labour?

A CERTAIN TENSION LIES at the heart of New Labour's style of government. On the one hand, the Blair government has been engaged, almost from its first day in office, in what amounts to a constitutional revolution, dispersing power across a variety of new institutions, and confounding the traditional reliance on single-party government by a new emphasis on cross-party alliances. On the other, the Labour leadership seems set on establishing a degree of control within its own party without precedent in modern British political history. At the institutional level, pluralism holds sway. Within the party itself, only one voice may be heard.

In the second edition of his valuable *Progressive Dilemma*, David Marquand explores this tension at some length.¹ For Marquand, this Blair 'paradox' is both intriguing and contradictory: although the current party leaders 'have imposed a Prussian discipline on their own followers, exceeding anything attempted by any previous Labour leadership . . . the logic [of their constitutional reforms] is pluralistic, and the end product will be a series of checks and balances at variance with the tacit assumptions of the democratic-collectivist tradition.' For Marquand therefore, 'it is not clear whether Blair and his colleagues understand what they are doing'.² Political strategies often lead to unintended consequences, and new governments are particularly prone to misjudgement. Strategic fallibility might therefore seem a reasonable hypothesis: the advancement of Labour control of the political process may be the endgame, and constitutional reform simply the wrong strategy. With time, it might be believed, the Labour leadership will become aware of the contradiction

and learn from their mistakes. The commitment to institutional pluralism will be reined in, and the party will revert to a more traditional style of governing—or see power slip from its grasp.

There is an alternative hypothesis, however, which not only begins to make sense of the apparent paradox but also knits together the approach to internal party discipline and external constitutional renewal as part of a wider, more coherent, and quite deliberate strategy aimed at transforming democratic governance. At its core, this new strategy is designed not to promote party government but rather to eliminate it: instead of seeking to enhance partisan control, New Labour strategy seems directed towards the creation of a partyless and hence depoliticized democracy. Ensuring that all Labour representatives are on message is not in contradiction to this: it is a necessary first stage. The process by which the current Labour leadership has sought to eliminate internal party dissent—marginalizing representative procedures inside the party, introducing plebiscitarian techniques, going over the heads of the party conference and the activist layer in favour of widespread membership ballots—is well known. Appeals to the ‘ordinary’ party member, and internal mandates on the basis of individualized postal ballots, have ensured a more deferential and permissive consensus inside the party. Through ‘democratization’, the leadership hoped to smother dissent—although later, when even ordinary party members seemed recalcitrant, the leadership had no qualms about resorting to more manipulative techniques to ensure their intended results. Thus other key steps included attempts to engineer the outcome of elections to the party executive and so ensure that candidates selected for Westminster, the European Parliament and the newly devolved national assemblies in Scotland and

¹ David Marquand, ‘Progressive or Populist? The Blair Paradox’, in *The Progressive Dilemma: From Lloyd George to Blair*, 2nd edition, London 1999, pp. 225–46.

² Other commentators have suggested that the tensions evident in the New Labour strategy stem at least partly from obligations inherited from former Labour leader John Smith, instancing the commitment to Scottish and Welsh devolution as the key example of this older Labour legacy—see, for example, Ross McKibbin, ‘Mondeo Man in the Driving Seat’, *London Review of Books*, 30 September 1999, and Will Hutton, ‘The control-freak gets his comeuppance’, *Observer*, 13 February 2000. As I suggest below, however, New Labour’s commitment to constitutional reform goes much further than this, and to argue that Blair and his colleagues are simply lumbered with past commitments is to underestimate both the seriousness and the reach of the current reform programme.

Wales, as well as those elected to the party executive itself, would be those most willing to follow Millbank's lead. Meanwhile, within these institutions themselves, the leadership's control of members' behaviour has increasingly reflected 'the Prussian discipline' to which Marquand refers. Even the traditional regard for Westminster has withered, as Anthony Barnett has recently pointed out,³ while collective decision-making has been further eroded by the downgrading of the Cabinet—which now scarcely functions—and through a renewed emphasis on more specialized government committees. Echoing the rallying call of fascist Italy, albeit now in a democratic discourse, what we see in this modern guise is a case of *un partito, una voce*.

Dismantling majoritarian democracy

At the same time, the first three years of New Labour government have been marked by a very substantial commitment to institutional pluralism, and a distinct and unprecedented shift towards consensus democracy. Traditionally, the British system of government has enjoyed a unique status among the advanced democracies by virtue of its unequivocally majoritarian features. Arend Lijphart, in what has now become a standard approach to the classification of democracies, has drawn a crucial distinction between majoritarian and consensus democracies,⁴ with the former being characterized by the centralization and exclusive partisan control of political power, and the latter reflecting a commitment to shared decision-making among a range of different political actors across a plurality of institutions. Lijphart's distinction was built deliberately on the exceptionalism of the British case, with the majoritarian model of democracy being typified by the institutions and practices then associated with the Westminster system: the majoritarian model was characterized by a unitary state, single-party government, a majority voting system, the absence of a written constitution or a process of judicial review, and the concentration of parliamentary power within a single legislative chamber. It was also characterized by a fusion of powers in

³ See Anthony Barnett, 'Parliament in Flux II: Busy Doing Nothing', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 February 2000.

⁴ Arend Lijphart, *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*, New Haven 1984. The model has been subsequently revised and extended in Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, New Haven 1999.

which the executive branch of government, while ostensibly responsible to parliament, effectively dominated the legislative branch.

Since coming to power in 1997 Labour has done much to dismantle this traditionally majoritarian system of government and has moved the UK substantially closer to Lijphart's alternative model of consensus democracy. The devolution of substantial decision-making powers to Scotland and Wales has undermined the unitary nature of the British state; the promise of regional devolution within England, together with the restoration of a single democratically elected authority to London, will take the decentralization process further—perhaps even to the extent that various English regional parliaments will work together with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in a multi-level federation. The majority voting system has already been abandoned for the regional assemblies and for European elections, and some form of proportional representation may even be adopted for Westminster elections. The incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into British domestic law brings the UK closer than at any time in history to an internal system of judicial review. The abolition of the voting rights of hereditary peers offers the potential for the creation of a more legitimate, and hence more active, House of Lords—perhaps promising a more genuine bicameralism. Finally, through the inclusion of Liberal Democrats in key cabinet committees, and an emphasis on the desirability of closer Lib-Lab co-operation, the Blair government has taken the first serious steps away from the wholesale reliance on single-party government—despite its own massive parliamentary majority. These are the new 'checks and balances' to which Marquand refers, and however much they may be at variance with 'the tacit assumptions of the democratic-collectivist tradition' they certainly differ from the traditional emphases of majoritarian democracy. Indeed, the only key element within the majoritarian model that New Labour seems intent on maintaining is that of executive domination over parliament, even though the devolution of power to regional assemblies and moves towards judicial review will clearly temper the efforts of the executive to exert control within the wider political system.

The structure of consensus democracy involves the dispersal of power across a variety of institutions with varying political majorities; it therefore runs decidedly counter to the traditional British notion that a single party, in possession of majority control in parliament, govern with refer-

ence only to itself. More than two hundred years ago it was precisely the capacity of such institutional pluralism to counteract majority partisan control that so endeared the proposed American constitution to the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. For James Madison, the value of the then novel republican constitution lay in its capacity to prevent a system in which 'the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority.'⁵ And since, for Madison, it was more or less impossible to do anything to cure these 'mischiefs of faction', the best strategy was to seek to control their effects. Hence the need to separate and disperse the exercise of political power across different institutions, whose incumbents would be given 'the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others . . . Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place.'⁶

Evading party?

Consensus democracy is therefore not only an alternative to majoritarian democracy but also antithetical to the emphasis on British-style partisan democracy—at least as this has been conceived within British political culture. It is in this sense that New Labour's promotion of institutional pluralism, together with its deliberate fostering of cross-party alliances, can be seen to limit the potential for majority party control. In Madison's terms, the Blair project is seeking to limit the effects of faction. It is easy to conceive this new commitment to institutional pluralism as sitting uneasily—and paradoxically—with concurrent attempts to eliminate internal party dissent and to deny intra-party diversity. What is being given with one hand—the new checks and balances—appears to be taken away with the other, through the top-down control of inter-

⁵ *Federalist* No. 10, as published in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, with an introduction by Clinton Rossiter, New York 1961, p. 77.

⁶ *Federalist* No. 51, pp. 321–2. Elsewhere (*Federalist* No. 47, p. 301) Madison famously notes that 'the accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.' See also the discussion of Madisonian democracy in Richard S. Katz, *Democracy and Elections*, New York 1997, pp. 53–6.

nal party life. The question then becomes, why bother? If overall party control is sought, why should power be dispersed? Or if power is being dispersed, why close down internal party pluralism? Or again, if the goal is to establish something akin to consensus democracy and political power-sharing, why place so much emphasis on party management and political engineering? It hardly seems enough to suggest that Blair and his colleagues don't know what they're doing.

Part of the problem lies in understanding the purpose party control is intended to serve. On the face of it, the emphasis on organizational discipline could be seen as being directed towards the strengthening of the party position. *Un partito, una voce* seems to imply a stronger, more purposive partisanship. Looked at more critically, however, it might also be seen as a way to take the party itself out of the equation. New Labour's drive to centralize the party and ensure that it speaks with one voice at every level—on the ground, as well as in the various representative assemblies—may be intended not to strengthen the party but to marginalize it. The purpose may not be to place party at the heart of a complex web of political control (a strategy clearly central to the old democratic-collectivist tradition) but rather to evade party—and hence partisanship—altogether. And this would certainly prove compatible with New Labour's drive to reform the traditional majoritarian constitution.

Focus groups as the people's will

Two distinct features characterize the current Labour leadership's approach: one programmatic, the other electoral. The first is the now widely touted Third Way, an approach to policy making its proponents represent as an advance beyond the traditional alternatives of left and right. Quite deliberately, this is not billed as a partisan approach, but as the only possible programme for contemporary government, both necessary and unchallengeable. The Third Way is not only depicted as open to all; there is really no other choice on offer. As Marquand notes, 'Moral and ideological arguments for the Third Way are unnecessary; it does not have to be defended against alternative visions of the future, based on different moral and ideological premisses. There is only one future, and resistance to it is spitting in the wind.' The second of these features involves reliance on the plebiscitarian techniques which have already been adopted within the Labour Party itself, and which are now being

extended more generally.⁷ Devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was preceded by referendums, as was the introduction of direct mayoral elections in London. The new regional assemblies in England, should they come to pass, will also be sanctioned by referendum, as will any change in the Westminster voting system or the decision to join the single European currency. Perhaps even more crucially, at micro level key New Labour policy decisions are now framed and effectively sanctioned through focus groups.

What is important about this latter development is that it seeks to establish a more or less direct linkage between citizens and government. Traditionally in Britain, in keeping with the central tenets of majoritarian democracy, the linkage between citizens and their government was mediated—first by party and then by parliament—rather than direct. Parties put forward alternative programmes to the voters, with the winning party then claiming a popular mandate for its policies, implemented in government through the approval of a parliament which enjoyed an unchallenged sway within the constitutional order. British democracy was party democracy, and party democracy gained its purchase through parliamentary sovereignty. With a mandate from its own voters, the party proposed, and parliament disposed. This was how majoritarian democracy worked and how it was legitimated.

What has changed is that it is 'the people' who are now to dispose, with both party and parliament being increasingly neutralized. For New Labour, party appears to serve no other purpose than to be the voice of the people writ large. It no longer enjoys its own autonomous agenda. Partisanship in this sense is a thing of the past—both electorally and ideologically. As Tony Blair concluded his address to the 1999 Labour Conference, 'To every nation a purpose. To every Party a cause. And now, at last, Party and nation joined in the same cause for the same purpose: to set our people free.'⁸ The relationship of this sense of democracy to the ideology of the Third Way is clear. Just as New Labour sees its

⁷ This aspect of the New Labour approach has been emphasized particularly by Lord Irvine, the Cabinet member in charge of the constitutional reform agenda: see, for example, 'Britain's Programme of Constitutional Change', lecture delivered by Lord Irvine to the Law Faculty, Leiden University, 22 October 1999.

⁸ The complete speech was included on the *Guardian* website, 30 September 1999: <http://www.newsunlimited.co.uk/lab99>

programme as the only alternative, and hence without partisan purpose, so too the style of government is deliberately advertised as non-partisan. This is not intended as party democracy. It is government for, and indeed of, the people, rather than of any particular section of that people.⁹ In this crucial sense it could be said to anticipate the establishment of a depoliticized and partyless democracy, which itself is perfectly compatible with power-sharing across the traditional party divides, the nomination to key positions of those outside the immediate party faithful, and the creation of institutions and electoral rules which appear to offer no immediate partisan advantage.

Assault on partisan politics

One crucial impetus behind this new strategy was Labour's experience of eighteen years of opposition to a powerful partisan government elected with only a minority of the popular vote. The 'factional mischief' wrought by the Conservatives under Thatcher and Major, and the incapacity of the opposition to impose any constraints on their mode of governing, served to convince Blair and his immediate supporters of the undesirability of strong party government of whatever hue. Institutional pluralism is therefore designed to prevent not only any future repetition of Conservative hegemony but also partisan rule as such. Instead, in a spirit Madison would probably have applauded (and recently echoed by a powerful restatement of the benefits of republican democracy),¹⁰ the goal is 'good governance'—defined here as a partisan-free democracy.

This new strategy necessarily requires a sharp break with Labour's legacies, in particular the tradition of party voice. New Labour may be seeking to establish the basis for a partyless democracy, but it achieved power as a party in the traditional sense—mobilizing an organization on the ground, and a network of relationships within the labour movement, in clear-cut opposition to the Conservatives. Although its leadership may aspire to a more neutral and depoliticized version of consensus democ-

⁹ In Irvine's terms (fn. 7), 'We have set out to be an inclusive Government—a Government truly of the people, for the people, by the people. We have set out to be a Government which returns power to the people from whom power ultimately derives.'

¹⁰ See Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford 1997.

racy, it won office within majoritarian terms of reference, and hence inevitably faces pressure from its own ranks to behave in more partisan fashion. To evade that pressure, and to undo the constraints it imposes, New Labour would like to take party out of the equation. In centralizing control, eliminating dissent and ensuring deference to the leadership by those in public office, New Labour is not aiming to strengthen the party but to sideline it. Seen in this light, the apparent tension between institutional pluralism and party discipline disappears. Both derive from an attempt to remove the politics of party from the governing process. On one side, decision-making is dispersed and power shared; on the other, the party is gagged, and policies are judged by the standards of good governance rather than partisan purpose. All of this is in keeping with the philosophy of the unchallengeable Third Way and setting 'the people' free. The point is to take 'politics' out of government. In the surrounds of contemporary Westminster there is now less and less regard for what Peter Mandelson has dismissively referred to as the 'tendentious grandstanding that more adversarial politics brings to debates in this place.'¹²

It is perhaps symptomatic of an increasingly general contempt for party politics that even the outright dismissal of politics as such attracts little comment. 'I was never really in politics,' claimed Blair, interviewed recently by the BBC. 'I never grew up as a politician. I don't feel myself a politician even now. I don't think of myself as a politician in the sense of being someone whose whole driving force in life is politics.'¹³ A similar anti-political, or at least anti-party political approach permeates the recent report on the reform of the House of Lords, in which the preference for appointed as opposed to popularly elected members is justified on the basis that 'the new second chamber should not simply be a creature of the political parties, and the influence of the parties on individual members should be minimised.'¹⁴ For politics, read party politics; and

¹² Quoted in Barnett, 'Parliament in Flux'.

¹³ *Blair's Thousand Days*, BBCa, 30 January 2000.

¹⁴ *A House for the Future. Report of the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords*, London, January 2000, p. 3. Tellingly, the argument goes on: 'We wanted to create a new second chamber which was politically astute but not a home for yet another group of professional politicians; which provided an appropriate role for the political parties but discouraged sterile partisan confrontation; and which included members of the political parties but was designed to limit the parties' influence and foster the exercise of independent judgement.'

for party politics, read bad politics. The democracy of the new century should be depoliticized democracy. For that, what will be needed is the 'ability to exercise an unfettered judgement, relatively free from partisan control', as the Wakeham report put it in the context of a new second chamber.

Two groups stand in the way of this new style of democracy. The first are the traditional 'forces of conservatism' Blair railed against in his 1999 Conference address: 'Arrayed against us: the forces of conservatism, the cynics, the elites, the establishment . . . On our side, the forces of modernity and justice. Those who believe in a Britain for all the people.' Here, New Labour strategy is clear: confine the more extreme elements of this opposition to an increasingly beleaguered and electorally marginal Conservative party in the Commons, and incorporate the moderate elements within the constitutional reform agenda (Patten, Wakeham) or the drive towards further Europeanization (Clark, Heseltine).

The second group to obstruct the New Labour project is the left, inside and outside Labour's ranks. Here its strategy is no less plain: deny these forces voice or influence. Hence its initial resort to plebiscitary techniques within the party, aimed at overwhelming the militant activists with the numerical weight of the more deferential rank and file; and when these became decreasingly successful, its subsequent manipulation of internal procedures to ensure that only those on message would reach key positions inside the party or on lists of candidates for public office. From the leadership's point of view its own favoured candidates do not express a partisan position at odds with that of the left; rather, the left is partisan, its own positions are not. Of course, this is an old story in political life. When political leaders attack partisanship, it is inevitably someone else's. Rounding on Ken Livingstone's candidature for the London mayoral elections as a return to the divisive politics of the 1980s, Blair did so not in the name of a more modern partisan politics that would replace what had gone before: his argument was rather that the partisan—read, 'left'—politics of the past was being pushed aside by a non-partisan—read, New Labour—politics of the future. In much the same way that Marquand interprets the ideology of the Third Way as requiring no defence against alternative visions, so, too, the new style of governance affects invincibility: the only alternatives—those of past partisanship—are no longer relevant.

It is still unclear whether this attempt to transform the governing culture in Britain can be carried through to its intended conclusion. Although Labour's parliamentary majority is currently secure, its electoral plurality is not. With just over 43 per cent of the vote in 1997, Labour actually won a smaller share of support than at any election in the 1950s or 1960s, and this in an election characterized by a record low turnout. Continued electoral vulnerability will almost certainly encourage elements within the party to fall back on a more adversarial style of politics which will immediately undermine the drive towards partyless democracy. There are also obvious limits to the leadership's capacity to control internal dissent: whether for reasons of ideology, contrariness, or simply because they wish to follow the ostensible logic of institutional pluralism, substantial numbers of Labour Party members in the emerging units of the decentralized British state seem set on establishing their own priorities and on rejecting direction from above.¹⁴ And while the New Labour leadership might happily see some of these dissenting elements exiting the party and forming their own radical left alternative (which could then be marginalized), the continuation of a majoritarian electoral system at national level makes this option highly unlikely. That said, the prospect of a potential left exit from Labour is probably a strong incentive for the leadership to reform the Westminster electoral system. To isolate the Conservatives on the right and its own radical critics in a separate party on the left could afford New Labour the space to cement an enduring and broadly based majority coalition with the Liberal Democrats in the centre.

Goo-goos

At the moment the Labour leadership is hedging its bets. The first steps towards institutional pluralism are now irrevocable, but the second stage—the creation of genuine bicameralism, a reform of the voting system for Westminster, the forging of an even closer coalition with the Liberal Democrats—is already faltering. Taken to the extreme, it is perfectly conceivable to imagine a wholly 'consensualized' British democracy, with the regions as well as the central government itself all run by virtually unshiftable centrist coalitions of New Labourists and Liberal Democrats, swatting off ineffective challenges from a rump

¹⁴ This theme is explored at length in Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*, London 2000.

right, on one side, and a minority left, on the other. Indeed, Tony Blair might prefer to govern on the basis of a cross-party coalition with the Liberals than in an internal party coalition with his own left. This could be the end game: consolidation of an ongoing coalition of 'goo-goos'—practitioners of good governance—periodically endorsed by 'the people' and its plebiscites. But it remains to be seen whether this future will be stymied by those legacies which New Labour would now prefer to forget.

A striking feature of New Labour's aspirations is the extent to which they appear to have a broader wind in their sails. Throughout the established western democracies, and pervading much new writing on democratic theory, can be observed an increasing assumption that the age of partisan politics has passed. Parties themselves, once regarded as the guarantors of democracy, are coming to be seen as *passé*. It is no coincidence that the preferred nomenclature is now 'New Labour' rather than the 'Labour Party'. Here as elsewhere there are echoes of the United States, where Clinton's famous strategy of 'triangulation' in 1996 was presented as a transcendence of the shabby interests of partisan politics in favour of a government of 'the people'. There has been a similar trend in Italy, where not one of the major 'parties' currently seeking to reconstitute the political system, from the *Democratici di Sinistra* on the left to *Forza Italia* on the right, now calls itself a party: the term has become a dirty word. Indeed, on the fringes of the political spectrum, and particularly among the new extreme right movements which have recently gained so much headway in countries such as Austria, Belgium and France, appeals are increasingly couched within a populist anti-party rhetoric.

Depoliticized democracy

On a more elevated plane, visions of the future emerging from the more disengaged confines of the academy tend to share an increasing disregard for party and partisanship, coded as proposals for a 'republican democracy', 'associative democracy', 'deliberative democracy', 'regulatory democracy', or whatever. Probably none of these theorists would endorse the more fanciful notions of the end of history current at the beginning of the 1990s, but all seem to assume the inevitability—and often also the desirability—of the end of politics, at least as this has come to be practised in most postwar democracies. In a sense far removed from that once mooted by Marx, politics is increasingly seen by many

theorists, as well as current practitioners, to be a matter of administration—or, in more contemporary parlance, good governance. There is an increasing tendency to believe that objective solutions to social, economic or cultural problems are most likely to be found after you have established a judicious mix of institutional correctness and expert, non-partisan judgements. Partisanship becomes redundant, democracy depoliticized. This is the ultimate logic of the Third Way approach to governing. Nevertheless, though anti-partisan, it would be mistaken to see this vision as simply anti-democratic. Nor, despite the eschewal of the role of party as mediating agency, should it be regarded as a rebranding of old-style populist democracy, or as what Anthony Barnett has defined as 'corporate populism'.¹⁵ Elements of populism certainly exist within the New Labour approach, and in some cases, as with Blair's 1999 Conference address, these have been blazoned without inhibition. Populism is also, of course, associated with demands for more direct or plebiscitarian forms of democracy—the people as master—that New Labour has made a central plank. Populism in its pure form, however, is completely antithetical to the constitutionalist elements of modern republican thinking,¹⁶ and it is these, above all, that inform the Blair project. This is not a mere reworking of older and more conventional traditions, but a novel combination of constitutionalism and plebiscitarianism. The voice of the people is clearly important but, contrary to the assumptions of partisan democracy, it does not set the political agenda in advance. Rather the people, via elections and plebiscites, serve as the ultimate check on their governors, endorsing or rejecting policies and programmes designed by the inner circles of relatively autonomous political institutions. Voters may not be invited to play a major role in formulating policy—that is a matter for their rulers—but they remain, if only retrospectively, the final arbiters. This is why sanctions are invited for election pledges that go unmet; and why New Labour's promises to voters take the form of a contract.

Unfamiliar as this configuration may be, it could yet become widespread within contemporary democracies. It is intriguing that a similar sense of how modern democracy can be made to work more effectively seems to

¹⁵ In *Prospect*, February 1999. See also Nairn, *After Britain*, pp. 76–80, where corporate populism is understood to involve 'neither ancient subjecthood nor modern constitutional citizenship' but rather a notion of the voter as 'consumer'.

¹⁶ On this, see *Republicanism*, pp. 7–11.

underlie recent arguments by the astute German political scientist Fritz Scharpf. Discussing potential legitimacy problems facing the European Union, he dwells on the limits of 'input-oriented democracy—*government by the people*,' and suggests that 'even in constitutional democracies at the national level, input-oriented arguments could never carry the full burden of legitimizing the exercise of governing power. They are everywhere supplemented, and in many policy areas . . . displaced, by output-oriented arguments showing how specific institutional arrangements are conducive to *government for the people*—meaning that they will favour policy choices that can be justified in terms of consensual notions of the public interest.'⁷

New Labour is currently engaged in what amounts to a full-blooded constitutional revolution, dragging the political system away from an extreme version of majoritarian democracy towards a more institutionally consensual model. But whereas the consensus democracies that developed on the European mainland grew from a foundation in party politics (with party both as representative and, collaboratively, as governor), the version underway in Britain seeks to break new ground by ruling party out of the equation. This is what is really novel about the New Labour project—a drive to pursue 'the public interest' untrammelled by the mischiefs of faction, offering 'the people' the sanction of judging in the last instance how that interest has been served. In its deep-rooted distrust of partisanship, this is a vision which increasingly suits the tenor of the times. Although not actually hostile to democracy, it appears to reflect a growing indifference towards it. When politics is contested by parties, it inevitably involves a conflict of alternatives between which voters are expected to choose. It requires public debate. When partisanship is removed from the equation, however, and constitutionalism is married to plebiscitarianism, such alternatives as emerge are presented, discussed and decided exclusively within the institutions, and the popular voice is only to approve or disapprove the agreements that have there been reached. Despite its populist façade, plebiscitarian democracy is flawed democracy. To offer citizens the choice of saying yes or no is not the same as offering the choice of real alternatives, and engaging them in a public competition of ideas. The model of good governance

⁷ Fritz Scharpf, *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?*, Oxford 1999, p. 188.

places the power of decision in the hands of the 'good governors' themselves. Party democracy, despite the disregard in which it is presently held, asked more of the citizen.

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SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

WHY WE ALL LOVE TO HATE HAIDER

THE ENTRY OF Jörg Haider's Freedom Party into a coalition government in Austria has been greeted with expressions of horror from the entire spectrum of the 'legitimate' democratic political bloc in the Western world. From the social democratic Third Way to the Christian conservatives, from Chirac to Clinton—not to mention, of course, the Israeli regime—all voiced 'dismay' and announced a diplomatic quarantine of Austria until the plague should disappear. Establishment commentators naturally hailed this demonstrative reaction as evidence that the anti-fascist consensus of post-war European democracy holds firm. But are things really so unequivocal?

Plain to see, in fact, is the structural role of the populist Right in the legitimization of current liberal-democratic hegemony. For what this Right—Buchanan, Le Pen, Haider—supplies is the negative common denominator of the entire established political spectrum. These are the excluded ones who, by this very exclusion (their 'unacceptability' for governmental office), furnish the proof of the benevolence of the official system. Their existence displaces the focus of political struggle—whose true object is the stifling of any radical alternative from the Left—to the 'solidarity' of the entire 'democratic' bloc against the Rightist danger. The *Neue Mitte* manipulates the Rightist scare the better to hegemonize the 'democratic' field, i.e. to define the terrain and discipline its real adversary, the radical Left. Therein resides the ultimate rationale of the Third Way: that is, a social democracy purged of its minimal subversive sting, extinguishing even the faintest memory of anti-capitalism and class struggle.

The result is what one would expect. The populist Right moves to occupy the terrain evacuated by the Left, as the only 'serious' political force that still employs an anti-capitalist rhetoric—if thickly coated with a nationalist/racist/religious veneer (international corporations are 'betraying' the decent working people of our nation). At the congress of the Front National a couple of years ago, Jean-Marie Le Pen brought on stage an Algerian, an African and a Jew, embraced them all and told his audience: 'They are no less French than I am—it is the representatives of big multinational capital, ignoring their duty to France, who are the true danger to our identity!' In New York, Pat Buchanan and Black activist Leonora Fulani can proclaim a common hostility to unrestricted free trade, and both (pretend to) speak on behalf of the legendary *desaparecidos* of our time, the proverbially vanished proletariat. While multicultural tolerance becomes the motto of the new and privileged 'symbolic' classes, the far Right seeks to address and to mobilize whatever remains of the mainstream 'working class' in our Western societies.

The consensual form of politics in our time is a bi-polar system that offers the appearance of a choice where essentially there is none, since today poles converge on a single economic stance—the 'tight fiscal policy' that Clinton and Blair declare to be the key tenet of the modern Left, that sustains economic growth, that allows us to improve social security, education and health. In this uniform spectrum, political differences are more and more reduced to merely cultural attitudes: multicultural/sexual (etc.) 'openness' versus traditional/natural (etc.) 'family values'. This choice—between Social Democrat or Christian Democrat in Germany, Democrat or Republican in the States—recalls nothing so much as the predicament of someone who wants an artificial sweetener in an American cafeteria, where the omnipresent alternatives are Nutra-Sweet Equal and High&Low, small bags of red and blue, and most consumers have a habitual preference (avoid the red ones, they contain cancerous substances, or vice versa) whose ridiculous persistence merely highlights the meaninglessness of the options themselves.

Does the same not go for late-night talk shows, where 'freedom of channels' comes down to a choice between Jay Leno and David Letterman? Or for the soda drinks: Coke or Pepsi? It is a well-known fact that the *Close the Door* button in most elevators is a totally inoperative placebo, placed there just to give people the impression they are somehow contributing to the speed of the elevator journey—whereas in fact, when we push this button,

the door closes in exactly the same time as when we simply pressed the floor button. This extreme case of fake participation is an appropriate metaphor for the role accorded citizens in our 'postmodern' political process. Postmoderns, of course, will calmly reply that antagonisms are radical only so long as society is still—anachronistically—perceived as a totality. After all, did not Adorno admit that contradiction is difference under the aspect of identity? So today, as society loses any identity, no antagonism can any longer cut through the social body.

Postmodern politics thus logically accepts the claim that 'the working-class has disappeared' and its corollary, the growing irrelevance of class antagonisms *tout court*. As its proponents like to put it, class antagonisms should not be 'essentialized' into an ultimate point of hermeneutic reference to whose 'expression' all other antagonisms can be reduced. Today we witness a thriving of new multiple political subjectivities (class, ethnic, gay, ecological, feminist, religious), alliances between whom are the outcome of open, thoroughly contingent struggles for hegemony. However, as thinkers as different as Alain Badiou and Fredric Jameson have pointed out, today's multiculturalist celebration of the diversity of lifestyles and thriving of differences relies on an underlying One—that is, a radical obliteration of Difference, of the antagonistic gap. (The same, of course, goes for the standard postmodern critique of sexual difference as a 'binary opposition' to be deconstructed: 'there are not two sexes but a multitude of sexes and sexual identities'. The truth of these multiple sexes is Unisex, the erasing of Difference in a boringly repetitive, perverse Sameness that is the container of this multitude.) In all these cases, the moment we introduce the 'thriving multitude' what we effectively assert is its exact opposite, an underlying all-pervasive Sameness—a non-antagonistic society in which there is room for all manner of cultural communities, lifestyles, religions, sexual orientations. The reply of a materialist theory is to show that this very One already relies on certain exclusions: the common field in which plural identities sport is from the start sustained by an invisible antagonistic split.

Memory-traces of labour

Of course, even to mention terms like 'class' or 'labour' is enough to invite the reproach of 'economic essentialism' from the postmodernists of the Third Way. My first reaction to the charge is: *why not?* If we look around the world today, we soon see how handy a dose of this out-of-

date way of thinking can be. The lands of former 'socialism', which the ideology of the moment still finds so hard to assign to their place in its scheme of things, offer particularly rich examples. How else should we conceive the connexion between the two mega-powers, the United States and China, for example? They relate to each other more and more as Capital and Labour. The US is turning into a country of managerial planning, banking, servicing etc., while its 'disappearing working class' (except for migrant Chicanos and others who mainly toil in the service economy) is reappearing in China, where a large proportion of American goods, from toys to electronic hardware, are manufactured in ideal conditions for capitalist exploitation: no strikes, little safety, tied labour, miserable wages. Far from being merely antagonistic, the relationship of China and US is actually also symbiotic. The irony of history is that China is coming to deserve the title of a 'working class state': it is turning into the state of the working class for American capital.

Meanwhile, the failed 'real Socialist' venture has left another legacy in Europe. There, the idea of labour (material, industrial production) as the privileged site of community and solidarity was especially strong in East Germany. Not only was engagement in the collective effort of production in the GDR supposed to bring individual satisfaction, but problems of private life (from divorce to illness) were held to be put into their proper perspective by discussion in the workplace. This notion is the focus of what is arguably the ultimate GDR novel, Christa Wolf's *Divided Heaven*. It is to be confused neither with the pre-modern idea of work as a ritualized communal activity, nor with the romantic celebration of older industrial forms of production (say, elegies for the authenticity of the English miners' lives in the manner of *How Green Was My Valley*), still less with any proto-fascist cult of craft work (along the lines of *The Meistersinger*). The production group is a collective of modern individuals who rationally discuss their problems, not an archaic organic community.

Therein perhaps resides the ultimate cause of *Ostalgie*, a continuing sentimental attachment to the defunct 'real Socialism' of the former GDR—the sense that, in spite of all its failures and horrors, something precious was lost with its collapse, that has now been repressed once again into a criminal underground. For in the ideological sensibility of the West today, is it not work itself—manual labour as opposed to 'symbolic' activity—rather than sex, that has become the site of obscene

indecenty to be concealed from the public eye? The tradition, which goes back to Wagner's *Rheingold* and Lang's *Metropolis*, in which the working process takes place in dark caves underground, now culminates in the millions of anonymous workers sweating in Third World factories, from Chinese gulags to Indonesian or Brazilian assembly lines. Due to the invisibility of all these, the West can afford to babble about the 'disappearance of the working class'. Crucial to this tradition is a tacit equation of labour with crime: the idea that hard work is a felonious activity to be hidden from public view.

Thus the only place in Hollywood films where we see a production process in all its amplitude is in the genre of thriller where the hero penetrates the master criminal's secret domain, and sees a hidden installation of furiously concentrated labour (distilling and packaging drugs, constructing a rocket that will destroy New York, etc.). When the arch villain, after capturing Bond or his like, typically takes the hero on a tour of his monstrous enterprise, is not this vision of some vast, illegal production-complex the nearest American equivalent to the proud socialist-realist images of the Soviet epoch? Bond's role, of course, is to escape and blow up the whole assemblage in a spectacular fireball that returns us to the daily semblance of our life in a world cleansed of the working class. What is abolished in the final orgy of such violence is a certain utopian moment in Western history, when participation in a collective process of material labour was perceived as the ground of an authentic sense of community and solidarity. The dream was not to get rid of physical labour, but to find fulfilment in it, reversing its biblical meaning as a curse for Adam's Fall.

In his short book on Solzhenitsyn, one of his last works, Georg Lukács offered an enthusiastic appraisal of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, a novella that depicted for the first time in Soviet literature daily life in a gulag (its publication had to be cleared by Nikita Khrushchev in person). Lukács singled out the scene in which, towards the end of the long working day, Ivan Denisovich rushes to complete the section of wall he has been building; when he hears the guard's call for all the prisoners to re-group for the march back to the camp, he cannot resist the temptation of quickly inserting a final couple of bricks into it, although he thereby risks the guards' wrath. Lukács read this impulse to finish the job as a sign of how, even in the brutal conditions of the gulag, the specifically socialist notion of material production as the locus of crea-

tive fulfilment survived; when, in the evening, Ivan Denisovich takes mental stock of the day, he notes with satisfaction that he has built a wall and enjoyed doing so. Lukács was right to make the paradoxical claim that this seminal dissident text perfectly fits the most stringent definition of socialist realism.

Perduring in the palace

Yugoslavia offers another variant of postmodern misconceptions of post-communism which cast more light on the West than on the former East. 'Enlightened' liberal states seem baffled by the reaction of rulers like Slobodan Milošević and Saddam Hussein to the campaigns against them. They appear to be impervious to all external pressures: the West bombards them, chips off parts of their territory, isolates them from their neighbours, imposes tough boycotts on them, humiliates them in every way possible, and yet they survive with their glory intact, maintaining the semblance of courageous leaders who dare to defy the New World Order. It is not so much that they turn defeat into triumph; it is rather that, like some version of a Buddhist sage, they sit in their palaces and perdure, occasionally defying expectations with eccentric gestures of almost Bataillean expenditure, like Milošević's son opening a local version of Disneyland in the midst of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, or Saddam completing a large amusement park for his elite nomenklatura. Sticks (threats and bombings) achieve nothing, and neither do carrots. So where have Western perceptions gone wrong? Our theorists, projecting onto these regimes a stereotyped opposition of rational hedonistic pursuit of happiness and ideological fanaticism, fail to take note of a more apposite couple: apathy and obscenity. The apathy that pervades daily life in Serbia today expresses not only popular disillusion in the 'democratic opposition' to Milošević, but also a deeper indifference towards 'sacred' nationalist goals themselves. How was it that Serbs did not rally against Milošević when he lost Kosovo? Every ordinary Serb knows the answer—it's an open secret in Yugoslavia. They really don't care about Kosovo. So when the region was lost, the secret reaction was a sigh of relief: finally, we are rid of that over-rated piece of soil which caused us so much trouble! The key to the readiness of 'ordinary' Serbs to tolerate Milošević lies in the combination of this kind of apathy with its apparent opposite, an obscene permissivity. Here is how Aleksandar Tijanić, a leading Serb columnist who was even for a brief period Milošević's min-

ister for information and public media, describes 'the strange symbiosis between Milošević and the Serbs':

Milošević generally suits the Serbs. Under his rule, Serbs have abolished working hours. No one does anything. He has allowed the black market and smuggling to flourish. You can appear on state TV and insult Blair, Clinton, or any other 'international dignitary' of your choice . . . Milošević gave us the right to carry weapons, and to solve all our problems with weapons. He gave us the right to drive stolen cars . . . Milošević changed the life of Serbs into one long holiday, making us all feel like high-school pupils on a graduation trip—which means that nothing, but really nothing, of what you do is punishable.'

Marx long ago emphasized that the critical test of a historico-materialist analysis is not its ability to reduce ideological or political phenomena to their 'actual' economic foundations, but to cover the same path in the opposite direction—that is, to show why these material interests articulate themselves in just such an ideal form. The true problem is not so much to identify the economic interests that sustain Milošević, as to explain how the rule of obscene permissivity can serve as an effective ideological social bond in today's Yugoslavia. Of course, Milošević's rule also yields an unexpected bonus for the nationalist 'democratic opposition' in the country, since for the Western powers he is a pariah who embodies all that is wrong in Yugoslavia. The opposition is therefore counting on his death as the moment when, Christ-like, he will take upon himself all their sins. His demise will be hailed as the chance of a new democratic beginning, and Yugoslavia accepted again into the 'international community'. This is the scenario that has already taken place with the death of Franjo Tuđman in Croatia. Ignoring the ominous pomp of his funeral, Western commentators dwelt on the way his personal obstinacy had been the main obstacle to the democratization of Croatia, opening up a fair prospect for the future of the nation—as if all the dark sides of independent Croatia, from corruption to ethnic cleansing, had now magically vanished, interred forever with Tuđman's corpse. Will this be Milošević's last service to his nation, too?

Expelling the material realities of sweated labour, collective production and anomic licence from its visions of the East, the official imaginary

¹ 'The Remote Day of Change', *Mladina*, Ljubljana, 9 August 1999, p. 33.

naturally has no time for traces of the working class in the West. In today's political discourse, the very term 'worker' tends to have disappeared from sight, substituted or obliterated by 'immigrants'—Algerians in France, Turks in Germany, Mexicans in the USA, etc. In the new vocabulary, the class problematic of exploitation is transformed into the multiculturalist problematic of 'intolerance of the Other', and the investment of liberals in the particular rights of ethnic minorities draws much of its energy from the repression of the general category of the collective labourer. The 'disappearance' of the working class then fatally unleashes its reappearance in the guise of aggressive nativism. Liberals and populists meet on common ground; all they talk about is identity. Is not Haider himself the best Hegelian example of the 'speculative identity' of the tolerant multiculturalist and the postmodern racist? Now that his party has reached office, he takes pains to stress the affinity between New Labour and the Austrian Free Democrats, which renders the old oppositions of Left/Right irrelevant. Both forces, he notes, have jettisoned old ideological ballast, and now combine a flexible market economics, determined to dismantle statist controls and free entrepreneurial energies, with a politics of care and solidarity concerned to protect children and help the elderly and disadvantaged, without reverting to dogmas of the welfare state. As for immigration, Haider contends his policies are more liberal than those of Blair.²

There is both truth and falsehood in such claims. Once in power, Haider—blatantly an opportunist rather than a genuine 'extremist'—would no doubt perform quite conventionally. After all, in Italy his homologue Fini, till recently a fervent admirer of Mussolini, is now the most respectable of democratic statesmen, whose reputation the whole Italian establishment—from President Ciampi and Prime Minister D'Alema downwards—has rushed to defend against 'anachronistic' slurs from Schröder. But for the moment, Haider is still a demagogue whose attraction in Austria is based on remaining an outsider. His self-comparisons with New Labour are to that extent deliberately misleading, designed to cover up the xenophobic kernel of his populism. They belong to the same series as attempts by Afrikaans politicians of old to present apartheid as just another version of identity politics, devoted to safeguarding the rich variety of cultures in South Africa. Ernesto Laclau

² 'Blair and Me versus the Forces of Conservatism', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 February 2000.

has taught us the distinction between the elements of an ideological construct and the articulation which gives them their meaning. Thus fascism was not characterized simply by a series of features like economic corporatism, populism, xenophobic racism, militarism and so on, for these could also be included in other ideological configurations; what made them 'fascist' was their specific articulation into an overall political project (for example, large public works did not play the same role in Nazi Germany and New Deal America). Along the same lines, it would be easy to show that Haider's manipulation of a menu of free-market and social-liberal dishes is not to be confused with the Third Way: even if Haider and Blair do propose a set of identical measures, these are inscribed in different ideological enterprises.

This, however, is not the whole story. There is also a sense in which Haider is indeed a kind of uncanny double of Blair, his obscene sneer accompanying like a shadow New Labour's big smile. For New Right populism is the necessary supplement of the multiculturalist tolerance of global capital, as the return of the repressed. The 'truth' of Haider's claim does not lie in the identity of New Labour and the New Right, but in the generation of his populism by the zombification of European social democracy at large. In Haider's clinching to Blair—we use the term in the precise sense, of the boxing-ring—the Third Way gets its own message back in inverted form. Participation by the far Right in government is not punishment for 'sectarianism' or a failure to 'come to terms with postmodern conditions'. It is the price the Left pays for renouncing any radical political project, and accepting market capitalism as 'the only game in town'.

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BENEDICT ANDERSON

THE ROOSTER'S EGG

Pioneering World Folklore in the Philippines

IN 1887, AT THE MADRID *Exposición Filipina*, a 23-year-old *indio* named Isabelo de los Reyes, living in colonial Manila, won a silver medal for a huge Spanish-language manuscript which he called *El Folk-Lore Filipino*. He composed this text in unwitting tandem with José Rizal (then aged 25), who was wandering around continental Europe composing the incendiary novel *Noli Me Tangere*, which earned him martyrdom in 1896 and, later, eternal status as Father of His Country and First Filipino.

Who was Isabelo? He was born in 1864 in the Northern Luzon archiepiscopal town of Vigan, to parents of the Ilocano ethnic group, the vast majority of whom were, in those days, illiterate. His mother, however, was evidently a poet of some quality, so that at the Madrid and later expositions her poetry was displayed for Spaniards, Parisians, and people in St. Louis. This accomplishment did not save her marriage, and the young Isabelo was entrusted to a well-off relative who sent him to a seminary in Vigan, where he organized a demonstration against abusive behaviour by the peninsular-Spanish Augustinians; then on to the College of San Juan de Letran and finally, for a degree as Notary Public, to the only colonial university then existent in Southeast Asia, the Dominicans' Santo Tomás in Manila. Meanwhile Isabelo's father had died, and the young man plunged into the burgeoning world of journalism. It is said that he eventually published, in 1889, the first newspaper in a Filipino vernacular.

But while still a teenager, Isabelo read an appeal in Manila's Spanish-language newspaper *La Oceanía Española* (founded in 1877), asking readers to contribute articles to develop a new science, named *el folk-lore*,

followed by a simple sketch of how this was to be done. He immediately contacted the Spanish editor, who gave him a collection of 'folklore books', and asked him to write about the customs of his native Ilocos.

Two months later Isabelo set to work, and soon thereafter started publishing—not merely on Ilocos, but on his wife's township of Malabon, the Central Luzon province of Zambales, and in general terms on what he called *el folk-lore filipino*. It became, for a time, the passion of his life. The question, naturally, is why? What was the meaning of *el folk-lore* for a clerically educated native youth in 1884? Much can be learnt from the Introduction and the first pages of his youthful masterwork.¹

The new science

Isabelo described *el folk-lore* here, albeit with some hesitations, as a *ciencia nueva* (a new science), perhaps consciously echoing Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, which had burst on the trans-European scene in the mid-nineteenth century, thanks to the efforts of Michelet and others. Isabelo explained to his readers, in both the Philippines and Spain, that the word 'folklore'—which he translated pungently as *saber popular*—had only been invented in 1846, by the English antiquarian William Thoms, in an article published in the London *Athenaeum*. The first folklore society in the world had been organized in London as recently as 1878—a mere six years before he started his own research.² The French had followed suit nationally only in 1886—just as Isabelo was starting to write. The Spanish had been caught intellectually napping; when their turn came, they had no thought but to incorporate the Anglo-Saxon coinage into Castilian as *el folk-lore*. Like his contemporary Rizal, Isabelo was starting to position himself alongside pioneering Britain, above and ahead of the tag-along colonial metropole. He was like a fast surfer on the crest of the wave of world science's progress, something never previously imaginable for any native of what he himself called this 'remote

¹ References hereafter will be mainly to the original text, published in Manila in 1889 by the publisher Tipo-Litografía de Chofré y C. Where relevant, comparisons will be made with a recent reprint combined with English translation by Salud C. Dizon and Maria Elinora P. Imson (Quezon City 1994), to be referred to in abbreviated fashion as Dizon-Imson. This new version, a valuable endeavour in many ways, is nonetheless marred by hundreds of errors of translation, and some mistakes in the Spanish transcription.

² *El Folk-Lore Filipino* (henceforward *EFF*), p. 8.

Spanish colony on which the light of civilization shines only tenuously.³ This position he reinforced in several instructive ways.

On the one hand, he was quick to mention in his Introduction that some of his research had already been translated into German—then *the* language of advanced scholarly thinking—and published in journals (*Ausland* and *Globus*) which, he claimed, were the leading European organs in the field. *El Folk-Lore Filipino* also judiciously discussed the opinions of leading Anglo-Saxon contemporaries on the status of the *ciencia nueva*, politely suggesting that they were more serious than those of peninsular Spanish *folkloristas*. He must also have enjoyed commenting that ‘Sir George Fox’ had been in conceptual error in confusing Folklore with Mythology, and some Castilian contemporaries in muddling Mythology and Theogony.⁴

On the other hand, the newness of this *ciencia* had a special colonial aspect to it, which he did not hesitate to underline. He dedicated his book to *Los folkloristas españoles de la Península, que me han dispensado toda clase de atenciones* (the Spanish folklorists of the peninsula, who have tendered me every manner of consideration). His Introduction spoke warmly of ‘colleagues’ in Spain—the directors of *El Folk-Lore Español* and of the *Boletín de la Enseñanza Libre de Madrid* in the imperial capital, and of the *Boletín Folklorico* in Seville—who had kept him abreast of research in the peninsula which ran parallel to his own work on *El Folk-Lore Filipino*.

The peninsularity, so to speak, of these colleagues was regularly underlined, as well as the peninsularity of their research. Without explicitly saying so, Isabelo (rightly) insinuated that no colonial Spaniards or creoles were doing anything comparable in the Philippines. This, of course, permitted him to position himself as a far-ahead-of-the-colonial-masters scientific pioneer of the new universal science. To explain this peculiar situation Isabelo resorted to an ingenious device—certainly made necessary by the violent, reactionary character of the clerically dominated colonial regime at the time. He described a series of courtly exchanges in the Manila press with a liberal-minded (almost certainly peninsular) medical doctor and amateur litterateur, who had contributed to local

³ Ibid., p. 19.

⁴ Dizon-Imson, p. 30.

newspapers under the penname Astoll.⁵ This move allowed him to quote the peninsular as admiring Isabelo's courage and imagination, but feeling deeply pessimistic about his chances of success in the face of the overwhelming indifference, indolence and mental stupor in the colony. 'Here the only things that grow luxuriantly are cogon-grass and molave—two tenacious local weeds.'⁶ And when Astoll finally broke off their exchange in despair, Isabelo, who had indirectly raised the question of why 'certain corporations' (meaning the religious orders) had contributed nothing, commented that in the circumstances 'prudence warrants no other course'. Into the mental darkness of the colonial regime, then, Isabelo saw himself as bringing the light of modern Europe.

Newness, however, came in still another guise in *El Folk-Lore Filipino*, and this was related to the idea of *ciencia*. The Introduction contains a most interesting discussion of the larger debate on the scientific status of folklore studies. Isabelo had fun noting that one faction of the peninsular *folkloristas* were so impatient to turn *el folk-lore* into a theoretical science that they soon could no longer understand one another—opening the way for a much-needed international discussion, in which the Anglo-Saxons appeared more modest and more practical. At the other extreme were those Spanish folklorists who were merely sentimental collectors of vanishing customs and conceptions for some future museum of the past.

Isabelo made clear what he thought folklore was about, and how he saw its social value. In the first place, it offered an opportunity for a reconstruction of the indigenous past which was impossible in the Philippines by any other means, given the absence of pre-Spanish monuments, inscriptions or, indeed, of any written records at all. (When Rizal tried to do the same thing a little later, he saw no other way to proceed than to read between the lines of the best of the early Spanish administrators' writings.) Serious research on customs, beliefs, superstitions, adages, tongue-twisters, incantations and so on would throw light on what he referred to as the 'primitive religion' of the pre-Spanish past. But—and here he sharply distinguished himself from amateur *costumbristas*—he also underlined the importance of comparisons. He confessed that until

⁵ Isabelo identified him as José Lacalle y Sanchez, a professor of medicine at the University of Manila (Sto. Tomás). *EFF*, p. 13.

⁶ *EFF*, p. 14.

he had completed his research he had been sure that the neighbouring Tagalogs and Ilocanos were *razas distintas*—distinct races—on account of their different languages, physiognomies, behaviour and so on. But comparison had proved to him that he had been wrong and that the two ethnicities clearly derived from a common source. The implication of the title *El Folk-Lore Filipino* was that further research would show that all the indigenous inhabitants of the archipelago had a common origin, no matter how many languages they now spoke or how different their present customs and religious affiliations. All this meant that, *contra* the colony's clerical historiographers, who began their narratives with the sixteenth-century conquest, the real history of the archipelago and its *pueblo/pueblos* (here he hesitated often) stretched far further back in time, and could not be framed by coloniality.

Riches of popular knowledge

On the other hand—and here Isabelo made a move that radically distanced himself from his peninsular colleagues—the new science could not and should not be confined to sentimental excavations of the quaint. *El Folk-Lore* is above all the study of the contemporary, in particular what he termed *el saber popular*. This *saber* was real knowledge, not 'lore' with its musty, antiquarian connotations. He offered the hypothetical example of a *schvaje* (wild man, perhaps a savage) in the forests near his home region of South Ilocos who might, any day (accidentally, Isabelo said) discover that a certain local fruit provided a better antidote to the cholera virus than that currently manufactured at the instance of the Spanish medical scientist Dr Ferran.⁷ The framing for such claims was the absence of serious scientific knowledge about almost everything in the Philippines. The recent Augustinian friars' compilation *Flora de Filipinas* (*The Flora of the Philippines*) was, for example, very far from complete.⁸ The indigenes had a much deeper knowledge of medicinal plants, of flora and fauna, of soils and climatic variations than did the colonialists, and this huge reservoir of knowledge, contained in the *saber popular*, was still unknown to the world. The Philippines thus appeared not merely as a region containing a mass of exotica unknown to Europeans, but also as the site for a significant future contribution to mankind, spring-

⁷ Dizon-Imson, p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11. The editors say that the book, a compilation by various hands, and edited by Fr. Andres Naves, was published in Manila in 1877 by Plana y C.

ing from what the common people knew, in their own languages, but of which Spanish had no conception. It was exactly the 'unknownness' of the Philippines which gave its folklore a future-oriented character that was necessarily absent in the folklore of peninsula Spain. It was also, however, the living specificity of the Philippines that positioned it to offer something, parallel and equal to that of any other *pals*, to humanity. This is the logic which would much later make the United Nations both possible and plausible.

So far, so clear. Too clear, in fact. For Isabelo's text, under the bright lights of its major themes, is also not without its shadowy complications. We might provisionally think about them under three rubrics.

Firstly, what was Isabelo to himself? To begin with it is necessary to underline an ambiguity within the Spanish word *filipino* itself. In Isabelo's time this adjective had two distinct senses in common parlance: 1. belonging to, located in, originating from Las Islas Filipinas; 2. creole, of the locally born but 'pure Spanish' social group. What it did not mean is what Filipino means today, an indigenous national-ethnicity. One can see how much things have changed over the past century if one compares just one sentence in Isabelo's Introduction with its recent translation into American by two Philippine scholars. Isabelo wrote: *Para recoger del saco roto la organización del Folk-Lore regional filipino, juzgué oportuno contestar al revistero del Comercio y, aprovechando su indirecta, aparenté sostener que en Filipinas había personas ilustradas y estudiosas que pudieran acometer la empresa.*⁹ This literally means: 'To save the organization of the Folklore of the region of the Philippines, I judged it the right moment to contest the view of *El Comercio*'s reviewer, and taking advantage of his insinuation, I pretended (??) to maintain that in the Philippines there exist enlightened (*ilustradas*) and studious persons capable of undertaking the task.'

The published translation—completely anachronistic—has: 'I tried to defend the establishment of Filipino Folklore by answering the accusation of the columnist of *El Comercio*, by bravely stating that there are indeed Filipino scholars ready and capable of undertaking the task.'¹⁰ Where Isabelo was thinking of a sort of global folklore which included

⁹ EFF, p. 13.

¹⁰ Dizon-Imson, p. 13.

the regional portion of the Philippines Islands, and spoke of enlightened persons in the Philippines—no ethnicity specified—the translators have omitted ‘regional’ to create a folklore of the Filipinos, and ‘enlightened persons’ to imagine ‘Filipino scholars’.

Forest brothers

In *El Folk-Lore*, Isabelo never described himself as a Filipino, for the modern usage did not seriously exist in his time. Besides, Filipinos were then exactly what he was not: a creole. He did, however, describe himself in other ways: sometimes, for example, as an indigene (but never by the contemptuous Spanish term *indio*), and sometimes as an Ilocano. In a remarkable passage he wrote: ‘Speaking of patriotism, has it not frequently been said in the newspapers that for me only Ilocos and Ilocanos are good? . . . Everyone serves his *pueblo* to his own manner of thinking. I believe I am here contributing to the illumination of the past of my own *pueblo*.’ Elsewhere, however, he insisted that so strict had been his objectivity that he had ‘sacrificed to science the affections of the Ilocanos, who complain that I have publicized their least attractive practices.’ Luckily, however, ‘I have received an enthusiastic response from various intellectuals (*sabios*) in Europe, who say that, by setting aside a misguided patriotism, I have offered signal services to Ilocos *mi patria adorada* because I have provided scholars with abundant materials for studying its prehistory and other scientific topics relating to this . . . province.’¹¹

Rizal opened his enraged novel *Noli Me Tangere* with a celebrated Preface addressed to his motherland, which included these words: ‘Desiring your well-being, which is our own, and searching for the best cure [for your disease], I will do with you as the ancients did with their afflicted: expose them on the steps of the temple so that each one who came to invoke the Divinity would propose a cure for them.’ And in the last poem he wrote before his execution in 1896, he too spoke of his *patria adorada*. But was it Isabelo’s?

There is a beautiful sentence in the Introduction to *El Folk-Lore Filipino* in which Isabelo described himself as *hermano de los selváticos, aetas, igorrotos y tinguianes* (brother of the forest-peoples, the Aeta, the Igorots and the Tinguians). These so-called primitive peoples, most of them

¹¹ *EFF*, pp. 18, 17.

pagan before this century dawned, and many never subjugated by the Spanish colonial regime, lived and live in the high Cordillera that flanks the narrow coastal plain of Ilocos. In his boyhood, Isabelo would have seen them coming down from the forests in their 'outlandish garb' to trade their products for lowland commodities. To this day, a form of Ilocano is the *lingua franca* of the Gran Cordillera. No one else in Isabelo's time, certainly no one who counted himself an *ilustrado*, would have spoken in such terms of these forest-dwellers who seemed, in their untamed fastnesses, utterly remote from any urban, Hispanicized, Catholic or deist milieu. (And Isabelo never spoke of any other ethnic groups in Las Filipinas as his *hermanos*.)

Here one sees how it was possible for him to think of his province as a big *pueblo*, and as a *patria adorada*, since in the most concrete way it linked as brothers the 'wild' pagans of the mountains and a man who won prizes in Madrid. Here also one detects an underlying reason why, in his proto-nationalist strivings, Isabelo went to folklore, rather than the novel or the broadsheet. Folklore—comparative folklore—enabled him to bridge the deepest chasm in colonial society, which lay not between colonized and colonizers—they all lived in the lowlands, they were all Catholics, and they dealt with one another all the time. It was the abyss between all of these and those whom we would today call 'tribal minorities'—hill-people, hunters and gatherers, 'head-hunters'; men, women and children facing a future of—possibly violent—assimilation, even extermination. Out of *el folk-lore*, child of William Thoms, there thus emerged a strange new brotherhood, and an adored father/motherland for the young Isabelo.

Strange beauties

What were the deeper purposes of the *folklorista's* work in Las Islas Filipinas? Apart from its potential contributions to the modern sciences, and to the reconstruction of the character of 'primitive man', we can detect three which have a clear political character. First, there is the possibility—the hope—of cultural renaissance. With a certain sly prudence, Isabelo allowed Astoll to speak on his behalf here:

Perhaps Folklore will provide the fount for a Philippine poetry (*poesía filipina*), a poetry inspired by Philippine subjects, and born in the mind of Philippine bards (*vates*). I can already hear the mocking laughter of those braggarts who have made such fun of you. But let them laugh, for they also

laughed at other manifestations of the *pueblo's* genius (*ingenio*), and then had to bow their heads in confusion before the laurels of [Juan] Luna and [Félix] Resurrección. [Two 'native' painters—one of them from Ilocos—who had just won prizes at exhibitions in Madrid.] And these traditions and superstitious practices which you are making known could one day inspire great poets, and enthusiastic lovers of the strange beauties of this rich garden.¹²

Elsewhere Isabelo quoted Astoll once again: 'If Sr. de los Reyes's studies and investigations make connections to *pueblos* (people) like the Philippine one [or is it the Filipino one?—*como el filipino*] where the character of the indigenes (*naturales*) has been depicted solely by the brushstrokes of dullwitted daubers, one can see how much potential value they have for the future.' Here Isabelo's work, printed in Manila, could open up the possibility of a great flowering of literary and poetic talent for the *naturales*, a talent before which boorish peninsulars and creoles would have to hang their heads in confusion. This is the normal hope and strategy of anticolonial nationalists: to 'equalize themselves up' with the imperial power.

Ridiculous beliefs

The second theme would be to subvert the dominance of the reactionary Church in the colony, best shown in a wonderfully deadpan chapter entitled 'Ilocano Superstitions that are Found in Europe'. It opens in this vein:

Taking advantage of the folkloric materials gathered by D. Alejandro Guichot and D. Luis Montoto in Andalusia, by D. Eugenio de Olavarría y Huarte in Madrid, by D. José Pérez Ballesteros in Catalonia, by D. Luis Giner Arivau in Asturias, by Consigliere Pedroso, with his *Tradições populares portuguesas*, in Portugal, as well as others, I have drawn up the following list of superstitions which I believe were introduced here by the Spaniards in past centuries. The list should not surprise anyone, given that in the early days of Spanish domination, the most ridiculous beliefs (*las creencias más absurdas*) were in vogue on the Peninsula.¹³

¹² EFF, p. 15.

¹³ EFF, p. 74. In successive footnotes Isabelo gives the titles of these authors' works: *El Folk-Lore Andaluz*; *Costumbres populares andaluzas*; *El Folk-Lore de Madrid*; *Folk-Lore Gallego*; *Folk-Lore de Asturias*. He also casually mentions an earlier work of his own, described as a *largo juguete literario* (long literary skit), entitled *El Diablo en Filipinas, según rezan nuestras crónicas* (*The Devil in the Philippines, as our chronicles tell it*).

Mischievously, the list begins:

When roosters reach old age or have spent seven years in someone's house, they lay an egg from which hatches a certain green lizard that kills the master of that house; according to the Portuguese and French, however, what hatches is a snake. If it spots the master first, the latter will die, but that fate will strike the former if the master sees the snake first. The Italians and the English, as well as some Central Europeans, believe it is a basilisk that is hatched. Father Feijóo says: 'It is true, the rooster, in old age, really does lay an egg.' The Portuguese and the Ilocanos, however, agree that what is in the egg is a scorpion.¹⁴

Other irresistible examples are these: 'To make sure visitors do not overstay, Ilocanos put salt on their guests' chairs. Spaniards place a broom vertically behind a door, while the Portuguese put a shoe on a bench in the same spot, or throw salt on the fire.' 'In Castile as in Ilocos, teeth that have fallen out are thrown onto the roof, so that new ones will grow.' 'According to the people of Galicia, if a cat washes its face, it means that rain is coming; the Ilocanos say it will rain if we give the animal a bath.' 'The people of Galicia say that a gale is coming when cats run about like mad; people in the Philippines substitute cockroaches for these cats.' Finally: 'Sleeping with the headboard facing the east is bad for Ilocanos. But for Peninsulars (Spaniards and Portuguese) it is good. All three agree that facing the headboard south is unlucky.'

One can see why Isabelo felt a *singular placer* in dedicating his book to peninsular folklorists, since they had offered him the scientific materials that would demonstrate the 'ridiculous beliefs' of the conquistadors, and to prove that, if the colonialists sneered at Ilocano superstitions, they should recognize many of them as importations of their own: any bizarreness in Ilocano folk beliefs had easy analogues in the bizzarries of Iberia, Italy, Central Europe, even England.

The third theme is political self-criticism. Isabelo wrote that he was trying to show, through his systematic display of *el saber popular*, those reforms in the ideas and everyday practices of the *pueblo* that must be

¹⁴ EFF, p. 75. Sources given are: Pedroso's above-cited work; Rolland's *Faune populaire de la France*; Castelli's *Credenze ed usi popolari siciliani*; V. Gregor's *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the North-East Scotland* [sic]; and Larousse's *Grande dictionnaire encyclopédique du XIX siècle*.

undertaken in a self-critical spirit. He spoke of his work as being about 'something much more serious than mocking my *paisanos*, who actually will learn to correct themselves once they see themselves described.' In this light folklore would be a mirror held up before a people, so that, *in the future*, they could move along the great highway of human progress. It is clear, then, that Isabelo was writing for one and a half audiences: Spaniards, whose language he was using, and his own *pueblo*, whose language he was not using, and of whom only a tiny minority could read his work.

Where did Isabelo position himself in undertaking this task? At this juncture we finally come to perhaps the most interesting part of our enquiry. For most of the hundreds of pages of his book, Isabelo spoke as if he were not an Ilocano himself, or at least, as if he were standing outside his people. The Ilocanos almost always appear as 'they', not 'we'. For example, 'There is a belief among *los Ilocanos* that fire produced by lightning can only be extinguished by vinegar, not by water.' Better still: '*Los Ilocanos no pueden darnos perfecta idea acerca de la naturaleza de los mangmangkik, y dicen que no son demonios, según la idea que los católicos tienen de los demonios.*' ('The Ilocanos can not give us a complete idea about the nature of the mangmangkik, and they say that *they are not devils* according to the Catholics' idea of what devils are.')

¹³ Isabelo here placed himself in the ranks of world folklore's savants, peering down at 'the Ilocanos' from above, and dispassionately distinguishing their superstitions from the parallel credulities of 'the Catholics'.

At the same time, there are a number of passages which have a rather different tonality. At the start of the exposition of his research results Isabelo wrote:

The Ilocanos, especially those from Ilocos Norte/Northern Ilocos, before starting to cut down trees in the mountains, sing the following verse:

Barí, barí

Dika agunget pári

Ta pumukan karní

Iti pabakirda karní

Literally translated these lines mean: barí-barí (an Ilocano interjection for which there is no equivalent in Spanish), do not get upset, *compadre*, for we are only cutting because we have been ordered to do so.

¹³ Dizon-Imson, p. 32.

Here Isabelo positions himself firmly within the Ilocano world. He knows what the Ilocano words mean, but his readers do not: for them (and by this he intends not only Spaniards, but also Europeans, as well as non-Ilocano natives of the archipelago) this experience is closed. But Isabelo is a kindly and scientific man, who wishes to tell the outsiders something of this world; and yet, he does not proceed by smooth paraphrase. The reader is confronted by an eruption of the incomprehensible original Ilocano, before being tendered a translation. Better yet, something is still withheld, in the words *bart-bart*, for which Spanish has no equivalent. The untranslatable, no less; and perhaps, beyond that, the incommensurable.

Isabelo suspected, I am sure, that his Spanish was by no means perfect, and might be laughed at by Astoll's 'dullwitted daubers' and 'braggarts'. He probably was also aware that the particular folklore methodology he was using might be doubtful in its systematics, and perhaps was soon to be superseded as science continued its grand world progress. But he had *bart-bart* in particular, and Ilocano in general, safely up his intellectual sleeve. On this ground he could not be contested. However, he needed to show, or half-show, his trump. This is the satisfaction of the tease: Dear readers, here is Ilocano for you to view, but you can only see what I permit you to see; and there are some things that you are actually incapable of seeing.

There is still a third position, which complicates matters yet again. In a chapter on 'Music, Songs and Dances', Isabelo wrote:

The lyrics of the *dal-lot* are well worth knowing. The *dal-lot* is composed of eight-line stanzas, with a special Ilocano rhyming scheme which you can see from the following refrain:

Dal-lang ayá daldal-lut

Dal-lang ayá dumidinal-lot.

I transcribe it for you, because I do not know how to translate it, and I do not even understand it, even though I am an Ilocano. It seems to me to have no meaning.¹⁶

But it remains 'well worth knowing', because it is authentically Ilocano, perhaps even because it is inaccessible to the frustrated bilingual author

¹⁶ Dizon-Imson, pp. 258-9.

himself. Isabelo leaves it at that. There are no speculations. But there is an intimation, nonetheless, of the vastness of the *saber popular*.

Three ill-fitting situations therefore: Outside (*they* can not give *us* a complete idea); Inside (there is no Spanish equivalent of *bart-bart*); and Outside Inside (even though I am an Ilocano myself, I do not understand this Ilocano-language refrain; but I am telling this to 'you', not to 'us').

What can be said by way of conclusions? I would propose four points.

I

From the end of the eighteenth century on up into our own, 'folklore studies', even if not yet defined as such, were a fundamental resource for nationalist movements. In Europe, in particular, they provided a powerful impulse in the democratizing development of vernacular national cultures—spreading through poetry, and other literary forms, to music, painting and dance. One could broadly generalize by saying that the impulse had the effect of aligning the language of folklore studies with that of a popular nationalism: Norwegian folklorists would write in 'New Norse' (not Danish and not Swedish) to recuperate the Norwegian *saber popular*; Finns would write in Finnish, not Swedish or Russian; and this pattern would be paralleled in Bohemia, Hungary, Romania, and so on. Even where this was not entirely the case—a striking example is the Irish revivalist movement which operated both through Gaelic and through a colonially-imposed English, well understood by most Irish men and women—the ultimate object was national 'awakening' and liberation.

At first sight, Isabelo's endeavour strikes one as quite different, because he was writing as much as anything for his non-nationals, in an imperial language which perhaps 3 per cent of the *indios* of the Philippines understood, and maybe only 1 per cent of his fellow-Ilocanos could follow. In Europe folklorists wrote mostly for their *paisanos*, to show them their common and authentic origins. By contrast, *folklorista* Isabelo wrote mostly for the modern world—Germany, Spain, England—to show how Ilocanos and other *indios* were fully able and eager to enter that world, on a basis of equal and autonomous contribution.

Isabelo's study also marks his country off from the many neighbouring colonies in the Southeast Asian region. In these other colonies, most of what we can informally classify as 'folklore studies' was carried on by intelligent colonial officials with too much time on their hands, in an age still innocent of radio and television; and it was intended mainly to be of use to the colonial rulers, not to the studied populations themselves. Even after independence, these other folklore studies have led a marginal existence, while they have done significantly better in the post-colonial Philippines. Why should this have been so?

One answer is that in all the other colonies there survived a substantial written record from precolonial times—royal chronicles, Buddhist cosmologies, monastic inscriptions, Sufi tracts, court literatures—and it was these, not folklore, that provided the fount of aboriginal and glorious authenticity when nationalist movements got under way. The remote Philippines had never had powerful, centralized and literate states, and had been so thinly touched by Islam and Buddhism that they were Christianized with remarkably little violence or revolt. Seen from this angle, folklore substituted for Ancient Grandeur.

Another answer, at least as good, lies in the nature of nineteenth-century Iberian imperialism. Spain and Portugal, once great imperial centres of Europe, had been in decline since the mid-seventeenth century. With the loss of Latin America, the Spanish empire had been drastically reduced—to Cuba, the Rio de Oro and the Philippines. Throughout the nineteenth century, Spain had been rent by the most violent internal conflicts as it struggled to make the transition from feudal past to industrial modernity. In the eyes of many of its own inhabitants, Spain itself was 'backward', superstitious, barely industrializing; and this understanding was widely shared not only in Europe, but also by the young intellectuals of the residual Spanish colonies. (This is why Isabelo was proud to have his writings published in Germany, while his equivalents elsewhere sought publication in the imperial metropolises.) The banner of progress was thus the flag of an Enlightenment (*Ilustración*) which had scarcely begun to conquer in Spain. Isabelo saw himself as an *ilustrado*, great-grandson of Denis Diderot; and thus involved in a common struggle with substantial numbers of Spaniards in the peninsula itself. In the colonial Philippines, the Enlightenment idea (so regularly denounced

today by scholars originating from the former British colonies) was experienced as a project of human emancipation which linked forces in both colony and metropole. It thus seemed quite normal to the youthful Isabelo to dedicate his work to his colleagues in Spain.

At the same time, the 'backward Philippines' was the one colony in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia to have a real university—even if it was dominated by the Dominican Order. From this university graduated Isabelo and many of his nationalist companions; here, ultimately, lay the reason why the Philippines became, at the century's end, the site of the first nationalist revolution in the whole of Asia.

3

Enlightenment came to the Philippines through the language of 'backward' Spain, and its prime agents, in every sense of the word, were therefore necessarily (at least) bilingual. (Many of the first generation of intellectuals also learned Latin in Manila and, if they went abroad, acquired some French and English and German as well.) Nowhere does one detect any marked aversion or distrust towards this Romance language so heavily marked by Arabic, the common vehicle of both reaction and enlightenment; and why this should have been so is a very interesting question. One reason is certainly that, in complete contrast to almost all of Latin America, Spanish was never even close to being a 'majority' language in the Philippines. Dozens of mainly oral local languages flourished then, as indeed they do today; nothing in Isabelo's writing suggests that he thought of Spanish as a deep menace to Ilocano or its future survival. Furthermore, Spanish appeared to him not only as the linguistic vehicle for speaking to Spain but also, through Spain, to all the centres of modernity, science and civilization. It was an 'international language' more than it was a colonial one. What also undergirded this approach was the fact that the Philippines had had no earlier 'language of power'—potential rival of Spanish—based in the dynastic speech of a precolonial political order.

It is striking that Isabelo never considered the possibility that, by writing in Spanish, he had somehow betrayed his *pueblo* or had been sucked into a 'dominant culture'. I think the reason for this seemingly innocent stance is that, in the 1880s, the future status of Las Islas Filipinas was visibly unstable, and some kind of political emancipation was looming

on the horizon. This instability had everything to do with local circumstances, but it was ultimately grounded on the emancipation of Latin America more than half a century before. Spain was the only imperial power which 'lost' its empire in the nineteenth century. Nowhere else in the colonial world did the colonized have such examples of achieved liberation before their eyes. Here one sees a situation wholly different from that of the twentieth-century New World, where Spanish has become both the 'eternal' majoritarian master over all the indigenous languages in Latin America, and an equally 'eternal' oppressed minority in the expansive/expansionist United States. No emancipation visible on the horizon in either case.

4

Nonetheless, as we have had occasion to indicate above, there are instructive reticences in Isabelo's youthful work, marked by the uneasy pronominal slippages between 'I' and 'they', 'we' and 'you'. He was always thinking about two audiences, even when writing for one and a half. 'The worst of men is the wretch who is not endowed with that noble and sacred sentiment which they call patriotism,' he wrote. Spanish was not for him a national language; merely international. But was there a national language in which it could be opposed? Not exactly. Was there a clearcut *patria* to which it was attached? A hypothetical Ilocano-land? He never spoke of it as such. Besides, there were those Aetas and Igorots who were his *hermanos*. There were also those Tagalogs who, his investigations had shown him, were not of a 'race distinct' from the Ilocanos; but he knew, as its discoverer, that as yet no Tagalogs or Ilocanos were aware of this scientific truth. It was this state of fluidity that led him back, at 23 years old, to the obscurely bordered culture out of which he grew, and which, he sensed, he had partly outgrown. Ilocano popular knowledge, or culture, thus came to its young patriot as something authentic, to be displayed to the whole world, as well as something to be corrected—of course, by the Ilocanos themselves. His mother-tongue, Ilocano, thus became something to be translated, while also partially untranslatable. And at some points it even slipped quietly away beyond the sunlit horizon of the Enlightened young bilingual himself.

TESSA MORRIS-SUZUKI

FOR AND AGAINST NGOs

The Politics of the Lived World

IN 1998 THE RAND ARROYO CENTRE, a research group affiliated to the US army, published a remarkable report entitled *The Zapatista 'Social Netwar' in Mexico*. Sponsored by the US Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, the document analyses the success of the Zapatistas in developing a new form of social mobilization labeled 'netwar': 'an emerging mode of conflict (and crime)' which relies on 'network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and technology attuned to the information age'. We learn that 'netwar' is characterized not just by the use of new communications media like the Internet, but also by the mobilization of horizontal networks of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which replace the hierarchical structures of older revolutionary movements. Quoting a Colonel Richard Szafranski, the study observes that the challenge from such networks is often 'epistemological': 'a netwar actor may aim to confound people's fundamental beliefs about the nature of their culture, society and government, partly to foment fear but perhaps mainly to disorient people and unhinge their perceptions.'

Networked transnational campaigns by social movements are not necessarily threatening; in some places, including Mexico, they 'may even have some positive consequences, especially for spurring social and political reforms'. Elsewhere, however, they pose a potential threat to US interests. The military must therefore arm itself for this new epistemological and virtual battle for hearts and minds, for 'in some cases, the United States may even want to foment [netwar], or at least be positioned to benefit from its effects'. In this environment, the report concludes,

'where feasible, it may be increasingly advisable to improve US and allied skills for communication and even coordination with NGOs that can affect the course and conduct of a netwar.'¹

The Rand Arroyo document offers an intriguing illustration of an important dilemma of contemporary social theory. On the one hand, it highlights the widespread acceptance—even in some unexpected quarters—of the image of flexible, networked, transnational social movements as key agents of change in the 'information age'. On the other, it seems to cast doubt on the equally widespread image of NGOs or networked social movements as progressive sources of resistance to the power of global capitalism. At a time when even the US military hopes to get in on the act of 'netwar' by 'coordinating with NGOs', what confidence can we place in the liberating potential of transnational networks of social movements?

Globalization and empowerment

In the rhetoric of globalization the same refrain slips back and forth between a major and a minor key, a threat and a promise. The threat is that a historically unprecedented mobility of capital, goods, people and ideas is hollowing out national sovereignty, and robbing citizens of their main forum for decisive collective action. At a time when the number of small, powerless states has increased, globalization is supposedly liquidating the military, economic and cultural foundations of national sovereignty. As Zygmunt Bauman has put it 'all three legs of the sovereignty tripod have now been shattered.'² In this elegy for lost nationhood, the disestablishment of the sovereign state is linked to the wholesale disempowerment of its citizens, since while democratic institutions remain in place at the national level, the real decisions are now made elsewhere. The experience of disempowerment which follows from this bypassing of the nation state extends beyond the narrowly political into the deeper realms of work and private life. The global mobility of capital under-

¹ David Ronfeldt et al., *The Zapatista Social Netwar in Mexico*, Rand Arroyo Center, Strategy and Doctrine Program, 1998 (published on the Internet at <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR994/MR994.pdf>), quotations from pp. 9–10 and 16. I am indebted to Dr Chris Ballard for drawing my attention to this document.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 123 and 129–31.

³ *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, New York 1998, p. 65.

mines job security; technological change devalues treasured knowledge; the rich variety of local tradition is obliterated by the spreading tide of coca-colonization. Political powerlessness is experienced as anomie, loss of cultural identity, and fear.

Yet just a slight shift of key transforms the same leitmotifs—'fluidity', 'uncertainty', 'eroded national boundaries'—from sources of fear into reasons to hope for new forms of social and political empowerment. The promise in the rhetoric of globalization is that while cross-border cultural flows may undermine nationhood, they also activate a multitude of other identities, introducing potentially greater flexibility into inherited forms of citizenship. As the boundary between the native and the foreigner becomes more porous, a generalized diasporic condition emerges from the margins, encouraging the formation of a new 'public sphere' composed of 'transnational coalitions outside state and market systems'.⁴ Sakamoto Yoshikazu remarks that in the wake of market powered globalization, 'contemporary civil society is rapidly coming to transcend the bounds of national frontiers'. NGOs in Western Europe will play, he predicts, an increasingly vital role in lobbying for worldwide regulation to limit the social and ecological damage wrought by global capitalism. In Latin America and other parts of the South, Elizabeth Jelin writes of an astonishing growth in 'international solidarity networks, geared to intervene in situations of economic exclusion and political oppression'.⁵ Are these networks bringing about a 'barefoot revolution' with the potential to solve many of the problems created by conventional forms of development policy?⁶

Even those who are cautious about the revolutionary potential of transnational social movements often see an important role for NGOs in resisting the forces of globalization. British social theorist Leslie Sklair,

⁴ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship. The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham 1999, pp. 215 and 237.

⁵ Sakamoto Yoshikazu, 'Sekai Shijoka e no Taikō Kōsō: Higashi Ajia Chūki Kyōryoku to "Shimin Kokka"', *Sekai*, September 1998, p. 72; and Elizabeth Jelin, 'Towards a Culture of Participation and Citizenship', in Sonia Alvarez et al, eds, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures*, Boulder 1998.

⁶ See, for example, Paul Elkins, *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change*, London 1992, pp. 38–9; the term 'barefoot revolution' is derived from Bertrand Schneider's *The Barefoot Revolution: A Report to the Club of Rome*, London 1988.

for example, argues that while 'movements working against global capitalism have been singularly unsuccessful globally', environmental, consumer and other groups have on occasion been locally effective in disrupting the smooth running of the system, and that these local disruptions, if repeated and linked across a wide range of locations, could eventually produce internationally significant results. The potential power of locally based social movements organized on a transnational scale was vividly illustrated by the large-scale NGO demonstrations which accompanied and influenced the outcome of the World Trade Organization Seattle meeting in November–December 1999.⁷

From new social movements to NGOs

So far I have been using terms like 'social movements', 'NGOs' and 'civil society' without any attempt to define them, but it is important to say something about the choice and meaning of these words, and particularly to pay attention to differences of nuance between the expressions 'social movement' and 'NGO'. Current theories on transnational civil society are much indebted to the work of Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens on 'new social movements' in the 1970s. Although it is hard to find a persuasive, all-encompassing definition, one could say that 'new social movements' are forces that challenge the existing order of things, either by direct protest action or by nurturing alternative lifestyles for their members. Though many, including the feminist and peace movements, have roots going back at least to the early decades of the twentieth century, they are 'new' in the sense that they typify the political in 'late modern', 'informational' or 'post-organized' capitalist societies.

What all such terms attempt to capture is a 'dematerialization' of the economy—the emergence of knowledge, design and symbolism at the apex of the value-added hierarchy: 'what is increasingly being produced are not material objects, but signs.'⁸ Similarly, new social movements reflect a shift in emphasis from struggles over material resources and

⁷ Leslie Sklair, 'Social Movements and Global Capitalism', in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds, *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham 1998, pp. 291–311. See also Sakuma Tomoko, 'Hô sareta gurôbarizumu: sekai no shimin wa naze WTO o kôgi suru ka', *Sekai*, February 2000, pp. 67–71.

⁸ Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economics of Signs and Space*, London 1994, p. 15.

physical security towards conflicts over culture, meaning and identity. For Alberto Melucci, the emergence of new social movements reflects a fundamental change in the nature of political life. In the late twentieth century, he argues, 'the state as the singular agent of action and intervention has faded away. It has been superseded by an overarching system of closely interdependent transnational relations, and its unity is split into a multiplicity of partial governments, with their own systems of representation and decision-making.'⁹ The system is increasingly bound and regulated by codes of behaviour and knowledge embedded in everyday life. The struggles of social movements therefore come to focus more and more on access to and interpretation of knowledge. Political opposition becomes increasingly cultural in character.

The cultural nature of contemporary social action is also emphasized by Anthony Giddens, who contrasts 'life politics' with the 'emancipatory politics' of more traditional movements for reform. 'Life politics', in Giddens's account, 'does not primarily concern the conditions which liberate us to make choices: it is a politics of choice. While emancipatory politics is a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of lifestyle.' Here 'lifestyle' means more than a pattern of fashion or consumerism. It involves deeper moral and existential questions of 'self-identity'—issues of 'how we should live our lives in emancipated social circumstances'.¹⁰ Giddens is careful to emphasize that life politics have not wholly replaced emancipatory politics, indeed that the two are closely interrelated. But his analysis does suggest a growing relative importance of cultural and epistemological forms of politics in the 'late modern age'. Others push the point further. Tony Spiby, citing Giddens, argues that the quest for individual fulfilment is the successor to a series of struggles for social emancipation that began in the nineteenth and came to an end in the middle decades of the twentieth century.¹¹

New social movements are thus the outgrowth of the diffusion of 'reflexivity' into the political sphere: their agency depends more on the decisions

⁹ *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 219–24.

¹⁰ *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 214, 215 and 224. See also Ulrich Beck, 'The Reinvention of Politics. Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization' in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, Cambridge 1994, p. 45; and Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 240–2.

¹¹ *Globalization and World Society*, Oxford 1996, p. 62.

of their members than on the guiding strategy of a handful of leaders. To establish the progressive credentials of such movements, sympathetic commentators often claim that they do not involve assertions of primordial identities of blood, community or religion, but are rather 'invented communities' with which people choose to identify themselves in a temporary and provisional way. Scott Lash and John Urry observe that 'we are not so much thrown into communities, but decide which communities—from youth subcultures to new social movements—we shall throw ourselves into.'¹² While work on new social movements flourished in the 1970s and early 1980s, from the late 1980s onwards it has tended to merge into a larger pool of writings on NGOs, which echo many of these earlier themes. These present NGOs as more flexible and decentralized successors to older political and social institutions, and emphasize their potential as participants in new forms of cross-border civil society. Much of this literature on NGOs is written in a breathless prose uncomfortably close to advertising copy, by academics falling over each other to discover radically new forms of social existence in everything from health food cooperatives to Live Aid concerts. Like the theorists of new social movements, champions of the NGO often find it difficult to define the precise object of their investigations. Yet the term NGO has associations which subtly distinguish the two.

BONGOs and GRINGOs

For social movements are usually taken to be agents of progressive social change, capable of altering government policies or transforming the life-styles of their members. But the acronym 'NGO' implies little about objectives. NGOs may pursue change, but they can equally work to maintain existing social and political systems. Besides, while social movements may be open-ended and anarchic in form, NGOs—as generally defined—possess a formal institutional structure. Though most definitions of NGOs, not surprisingly, emphasize their voluntary and non-governmental character, a number of critics have noted the difficulty of drawing a sharp dividing line between the 'governmental' and 'non-governmental'. After all, it is not uncommon for 'non-governmental' groups to rely substantially on official funding. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications are

¹² *Economics of Sign and Space*, p. 316. See also Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, London 1989, pp. 45–55.

significant sources of finance for the international activities of some Japanese NGOs.¹³ The amorphousness of the boundary between 'state' and 'civil society' has given rise to some ironic hybrids like the BONGO (Business Organized NGO) and the oxymoronic GRINGO (Government Run/Initiated NGO).¹⁴

The shift in attention from new social movements to NGOs has allowed much of the emancipatory rhetoric surrounding the former to be harnessed to the latter. Growing interest in the political and social role of NGOs may reflect the vitality of civil society in the newly democratized societies of Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Yet it also corresponds to the spread of neo-liberal policies, as states shift responsibility for some of their social and welfare functions to private or volunteer groups. It is therefore understandable why governments and institutions like the World Bank have often shown a liking for the rhetoric of emancipation: NGOs can be instruments of 'good governance'.

While the notion of new social movements tended to be based on the experience of the wealthier democracies, particularly those of Western Europe, NGO theory has by contrast drawn extensively on the experience of poorer nations. The recent popularity of the term 'NGO' may in this sense reflect difficulties in transferring theories of new social movements *in toto* from North to South. The very idea of 'life politics' or of the cultural nature of the political becomes problematic when crossing this geo-economic divide. Alberto Melucci argues that new social movements emerge in 'a post-material society, in which the primary needs of the population are to a large extent satisfied.'¹⁵ This—like Giddens's dilemma of 'how to live our lives in emancipated circumstances'—hardly seems to capture the realities of life for most of the inhabitants of Africa, Asia or Latin America, or even indigenous communities and other marginalized minorities in the wealthier nations themselves. So a clarification of the terms is in order. In the discussion that follows, I shall generally use the term 'social movement' without the adjective 'new',

¹³ Toshihiro Menju and Takako Aoki, 'The Evolution of Japanese NGOs in the Asia Pacific Context', in Tadashi Yamamoto, *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community*, Singapore 1995, p. 151.

¹⁴ See Karina Constantino-David, 'Intra-Civil Society Relations: An Overview', in Miriam Coronel Ferrer, ed., *Making Civil Society* (volume 3 of *Philippine Democracy Agenda*), Quezon City 1997, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Nomads of the Present*, p. 177.

since my main concern will be groups struggling for empowerment, whether or not they are strictly non-governmental. Although many of the social movements referred to below are indeed also Non-Governmental Organizations, some do not fit normal definitions of the NGO. Use of the NGO as an analytical category, moreover, risks creating a conceptual boundary between the 'governmental' and the 'non-governmental' which may in some ways be an obstacle to understanding contemporary social change. Still, I want to follow the path of NGO theorists by extending the debate on social movements beyond the zone of the North Atlantic democracies.

Lived worlds and governmental belonging

Theories of social movements that were developed in the 1970s opened up fresh approaches to the politics of empowerment by pointing not just to new organizational forms—decentralized, networked or cross-border structures—but also to new arenas of contestation. Knowledge, identity and meaning were highlighted as key terrains of political conflict in the contemporary world. But were these shifts really to be attributed to the advent of a post-material society? It is surely clear that images of post-materialism or 'life politics' say very little about those whose basic material needs are far from satisfied. In fact, they replicate the conceptual separation between a material world and non-material domains of knowledge, symbolism and identity that once plagued the cruder versions of base and superstructure in Marxist controversies, and have more recently dogged debates over the limits of postmodernism. But the contemporary world of global capital is not a universe where the non-material has conquered or subordinated the material: it is one where matter and symbol increasingly *interpenetrate*. We must therefore find ways of looking at political agency which unite the material and symbolic dimensions of life rather than counterposing them. One such lies in the idea of empowerment as activity that enhances people's ability to 'influence the processes of change in their lived world'.

Here I adapt the term 'lived world' from the anthropologist Brad Weiss, who coined it to describe the way the Haya people of north-east Tanzania inhabit and experience their environment.¹⁶ My usage will stress the importance of our bodily sensations of material life, and of the tacit

¹⁶ *The Making and Unmaking of the Haya Lived World*, Durham 1996, p. 7.

meanings with which we invest it. The lived world is the tangible universe of our experience, with its lay out of rooms, streets, shops, telephone connexions, railway stations and airlines, the familiar constraints of food prices and pay packets, working hours and meal times. All these circumscribe our possibilities for social and political action. But this is also a universe bound by webs of meaning that frame and define the objects, persons and places we encounter, and allow us to determine which actions should be called 'social' or 'political'. This simultaneously material and signified world unfolds before us, or presses in upon us, as we discover new or undergo old experiences.⁷

One of the most fundamental and unsettling characteristics of the contemporary lived world is the rapidity of the changes that are now part of its very fabric. Even for a relatively self-contained rural community like the Haya, the boundaries of the lived world are not confined within a demarcated geographical region. Migration in search of work, inflow of commodities and information, spread of diseases like AIDS—all these bring cross-border realities into their range of experience. Some of these inter-regional or international dimensions of their experience are visible and understood; but others remain largely invisible. For constitutively, the lived world is a time and space which is *interpreted*—by a whole series of internalized notions like 'village', 'neighbourhood', 'nation', 'modern', 'backward', and so on. These may extend to places we have never visited. In a global order where all lives are becoming increasingly interconnected, they will typically make some linkages visible, while occluding others. In a recent study of citizenship in the Philippines, Maria Canieso-Doronila points out significant discursive differences in the lived worlds of various Filipino communities. For the Sama, a nomadic fishing people of Boheh Umos, the lived world comprises their own mobile community and the commercial networks, largely of Chinese traders, with whom they have immediate contact. Although they are 'Filipino nationals' in a formal sense, the concept of the nation-state has almost no real bearing on their experience of the world. By contrast, most rural communities in the Christian lowlands do possess a distinct sense of their world as encompassed by 'the nation', and participate to a limited extent in the

⁷ Hence it is to be distinguished from Habermas's concept of 'lifeworld', which focuses more on the epistemological 'reservoir of taken-for-granted', of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation' *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. II, Boston 1987, p. 124.

rituals of its politics. Even if villagers have not travelled beyond their immediate region, 'Manila' is part of their world as a city where events that may affect their lives occur. But for many lowland rural people, 'Saudi Arabia' is just as much a place on the map of their experience, to which they may have travelled in search of work, or from which relatives send letters and remittances.¹⁸ On the other hand the lives of many peasants, particularly those cultivating cash-crops, can be profoundly affected by fluctuations on the futures and commodities markets of the United States, without the Chicago Exchange or Wall Street consciously entering their lives at all.

We need, too, to consider not just the way in which people 'map' the world to which they belong, but also what they mean by 'belonging'. Discussing different conceptions of national identity, the Australian social critic Ghassan Hage contrasts 'passive belonging'—a sense of familiarity or 'at-home-ness' in a particular territory—with 'governmental belonging', which he defines as 'the belief that one has a right over the nation . . . the right to contribute (even if only by having a *legitimate* opinion with regard to the internal and external politics of the nation) to its management'.¹⁹ In Filipino rural communities, a sense of 'governmental belonging' felt towards the nation—or even the local region—is diluted not just by wide socio-economic differences between political rulers and the ruled, but also by cognitive disparities between urban elites and rural masses. Such social divisions foster an attitude of civic alienation, leading many citizens to 'accommodate abusive and corrupt central regimes, while feeling essential indifference and estrangement from them'. Grass-roots social movements in the Philippines now strive to convert a sense of 'passive belonging' to the lived world into a sense of 'governmental belonging'—by encouraging individuals to 'take control of their lives and participate in concerted action', initially at the level of the local community, and eventually in the higher sphere of the nation.²⁰

¹⁸ Maria Luisa Canieso-Doronila, 'An Overview of Filipino Perspectives on Democracy and Citizenship', in Maria Serena Diokno, ed., *Democracy and Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture* (vol. I of *Philippine Democracy Agenda*) Quezon City 1997, pp. 77–8 and 82–4; see also Myrna Alejo et al., *Describing Elections: A Study of Elections in the Lifeworld of San Isidro*, Quezon City 1996.

¹⁹ *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Sydney 1998, p. 46.

²⁰ Canieso-Doronila, pp. 85–6.

Such political struggles highlight the constant changes in the meanings with which we invest our material space. A sense of the lived world is not simply inherited from our education and upbringing. It is a product of continuous, often unconscious contestation. Meanings are made and re-made through action and reflection, conflict and communication. People brought up in Filipino villages find themselves working as adults in Riyadh or Tokyo and watching television beamed in from Texas. Their families are often scattered across the planet from North America to Southeast Asia to Mediterranean Europe. As these spatial configurations become more complex and dynamic, the chances that the lived world of an individual will coincide exactly with that of neighbours or workmates diminish. Yet at the same time it is likely to intersect *at some point*—to have *certain* elements in common—with the worlds of an ever-expanding number of other individuals in an ever-growing range of places.

Knowledge and value

Hence a shift away from political action founded on the permanent ties of a stable community, towards temporary or contingent alliances based on particular junctions between different lived worlds. In a social order where the lived worlds of individuals overlap but do not fuse, common grounds for political action cannot be assumed. Shared knowledge and experience are necessary to create the collective story that makes a social movement possible. Empowerment, however, is not just a matter of identification with a particular social group. It also requires identification of the relevant locus of social and political power, as the 'laws' of the social order become increasingly complex, opaque and resistant to managerial control, while accumulation itself no longer rests on the exploitation of a homogeneous labour power. Today economic conflicts are tending to become inseparable from struggles over the recognition and valuation of rival forms of knowledge. Thus power no longer appears as the visible apex of a figure which the powerless must ascend or flatten to secure their interests; it has, rather, become activity embedded in the rules and norms of the lived world. Inequality flows less from the overt actions of particular 'power elites' than from uneven access to key forms of knowledge and 'cultural capital'.

That access to knowledge has become economically critical does not mean we live in a 'post-material world' of satisfied demands and emancipated circumstances. It simply highlights the pervasive and irreversible

interpenetration of the material and the symbolic. In the contemporary world economy, capital reaches the outer limits of the earth's remotest islands and mountain villages; but it also colonizes the inner spaces of the lived world—leisure, nature, soma. This double expansion of capital, outwards and inwards, brings an enormous number of disparate ways of fulfilling material and spiritual needs into direct confrontation. Combined and uneven development, no longer simply a matter of modes of production, becomes a clash between forms of life embodied in different types of food, dress, language, music and dance. These contests over value increasingly determine which goods, practices and institutions can be incorporated into the system of accumulation, and on what terms. What is the standing on the world market of a Sama ability to forecast storms, a Chinese rural cure for rheumatism, or an Australian Aboriginal child's toys? The colonization of the world by capital makes starkly clear the extent to which economic value is a function of moral and social value.

In fact, exchange value has never simply been a matter of abstract utility, relative scarcity or production costs. It has always been the product of a constantly rewritten 'social memory', whose judgements reflect the outcome of historical struggles to define the relative worth of the commodities exchanged. Such struggles also determine how communities value the skill and labour of the people who produce those commodities—indeed which sorts of activity are classified as 'labour' in the first place. Maurice Halbwach's social or collective memory—what might be called his 'memory theory of value'²¹—is in this respect rather similar to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*—'embodied history, internalized as second nature and forgotten as history': a concept which focuses on the way unequal distributions of wealth and power are agonistically interpreted through rival value schemes. Cultural capital is not disembodied knowledge; it is micro-power incarnated in physical appearance, gesture, accent and dress, and perceived through a grid of unconscious prejudices, stereotypes and fears. In Bourdieu's account, certain children start from infancy onwards to acquire special types of knowledge, patterns of speech and forms of conduct that later come to constitute 'cultural capital'. Enhanced by formal schooling, these are the assets that allow social elites to recognize the worth of a Picasso or a vintage claret. But

²¹ *La Mémoire Collective*, Paris 1950, p. 153.

cultural capital involves more than the game of conspicuous consumption. It provides direct access to positions of social power, and in some circumstances can be converted into economic capital—commanding income flows well above those without it. Possessors of cultural capital, moreover, are likely to be those who can read and write the more opaque rules of the economic game.²²

In this schema, Bourdieu usually draws a fairly sharp distinction between the 'cultural economy' and the material economy of modern capitalist societies. But as Lash remarks, 'the real material economy . . . is becoming more like Bourdieu's cultural economy'.²³ For as networks of production and consumption become ever more global, and knowledge and design more important elements in the production process, 'value judgements' about the markers of 'cultural capital' become increasingly central in determining the price that things command on the market. The contemporary expansion of capitalism into every last recess of the lived world intensifies what have always been highly unequal struggles over recognition and valuation. As lived worlds increasingly overlap, without fusing, contests between different value schemes become more politically visible and decisive. Whose systems of ownership and codes of law will be judged compatible with national or international law, with treaty organizations like NAFTA or the WTO? Whose products will be sold in fast-food outlets or prepared in *cordon bleu* restaurants? Whose agricultural or health care practices will be singled out for research and development by international bureaucracies? Whose idioms, speech patterns, gestures or *savoir faire* will serve as credentials for well-paid and influential jobs?

In a world where the symbolic and material interpenetrate, struggles over meaning and value are inseparable from struggles over wealth and power. Rather than merely being a matter of a 'life politics', these are—to use a phrase of Ulrich Beck in a rather different sense—often questions of 'life-and-death politics'.²⁴ In a marginalized Filipino fishing community,

²² See for example Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York 1986, pp. 241–58.

²³ 'Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Economy and Social Change', in Craig Calhoun et al., eds., *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, Chicago 1993, p. 206.

²⁴ 'The Reinvention of Politics', pp. 44–7.

a social movement which encourages its members to exchange ideas on traditional fishing practices is not merely seeking to promote self-actualization or create a sense of identity. It is also trying to work out practical remedies for poverty and malnutrition, and to expose hidden structures of local, national and international power as targets for future political action. Indigenous organizations which challenge structures of property ownership or resource-use are not simply asserting a symbolic ethnicity. Rather, battles over the titles of knowledge are inseparably linked to struggles against marginalization, discrimination and unemployment, and their consequences for mental and physical health—as Aboriginal activist Peter Yu points out, pressing claims for land and cultural autonomy in Western Australia as conditions of basic rights to housing, clean water, sewage and health care.²⁵

This is not a world where ‘emancipatory politics’ is giving way to ‘life politics’, or struggles over wealth and power have yielded to contests over identity and self-actualization. Just as the symbolic and material are intertwined in the realms of production and consumption, so in the political arena conflicts about wealth and power increasingly overflow into fights about meanings, and vice versa. Although such contests are not in themselves new, they assume much greater importance in a world where growing transborder flows of goods, persons and meanings are charged with invisible inequalities of power.

New politics of old social movements

It is sometimes pointed out that many so-called ‘new social movements’ have deep historical roots. During the late 1980s, the global peace movement was often presented as an archetype of the politics of postmodernity. But international peace activism had its origins in the first half of the twentieth century, flourished with the rise of groups like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1950s, and waned in the 1990s, in the almost certainly mistaken belief that the threat of nuclear war had receded. In some ways, it may therefore be more interesting to focus, not on ‘new social movements’ in the literal sense of the phrase, but rather on older social movements that have changed

²⁵ Peter Yu, ‘Multilateral Agreements—A New Accountability in Aboriginal Affairs’, in Galarrwuy Yunupingu, ed., *Our Land is our Life: Land Rights—Past, Present and Future*, Brisbane 1997, p. 170.

the nature of their activism over time. In the transformation of these forces we can observe some contours of an emergent politics of the lived world. For these are movements that have become—in an expression of the Japanese philosopher Hanazaki Kōhei—increasingly ‘multiversal’.²⁶ That is, they find it necessary to operate simultaneously on local, national and global levels—to articulate specific local experiences and forms of knowledge even as they address common global concerns.

A good example of emerging multiversal strategies of empowerment can be found in the history of the Philippines Rural Reconstruction Movement, whose ancestry goes back to the early twentieth century, and whose experience offers a striking illustration of the flow of liberating ideas across borders.²⁷ The concept of rural reconstruction originated during the First World War in the efforts of Dr Y. C. James Yen to provide basic education for Chinese migrant labourers in Europe. During the interwar years, partly inspired by the Japanese New Village [*Atarashiki Mura*] movement—itself a local incarnation of Tolstoyan social ideas—Yen’s scheme evolved into a more ambitious programme for village development in China. After the Pacific War, these projects in turn provided the model for an international movement, centred on the Philippines-based International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR). The Institute’s activities were funded by US agencies and some Southeast Asian and Latin American governments, who saw its gradualist development strategies as a potential antidote to the popular appeal of Marxism. The Filipino branch of the movement flourished during the 1950s and 1960s, declined during the late 1970s, and was then revitalized under a charismatic leader, Horacio ‘Boy’ Morales, after 1986. Despite its professed creed of ‘learning from the people’, in its earlier days the movement had a distinctly hierarchical structure of field work-

²⁶ *Kojin/Kojin o Koeru Mono*, Tokyo 1996, pp. 23–6.

²⁷ This account of the development of the PRRM draws on Gerard Clarke’s excellent study, *The Politics of NGOs in Southeast Asia: Participation and Protest in the Philippines*, London 1998, pp. 138–64; see also Paul Francis Kaplan, *The Impact of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement*, unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University 1969; Estrella Gonzaga, ‘Indigenous Knowledge in the History of the Rural Reconstruction Movement’, in *Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development in the Philippines*, Silang 1994, p. 26; and James Yen, ‘International Institute of Rural Reconstruction and Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement’, in H. B. Price, ed., *Rural Reconstruction and Development: A Manual for Field Workers*, New York 1967, p. 26.

ers, team captains, field assistants and directors. Though its texts stressed the use of technologies suitable for local needs and the importance of releasing the 'potential powers' of peasants themselves, in practice its vision of appropriate technology depended largely on 'stepping down' existing 'first world' scientific knowledge to meet local needs. At the same time, efforts to promote social uplift and self-reliance were assiduously separated from any direct challenges to the structures of political power. Since 1986, however, the organization has been radically decentralized, and much greater emphasis placed on mobilizing grass-roots communities.

This reorientation brings the PRRM much more closely in line with the host of other social movements that have flourished in the Philippines since the fall of Marcos. Though Filipino social movements are typically riven by fissures, they have all undergone a transition away from large hierarchical bodies like the PRRM of the 1950s, towards smaller local groups, often participating in horizontal alliances. Their strategies often begin with the organization of meetings, discussion groups or story-telling sessions at which people exchange information and experience, and in the process develop a clearer idea of the social problems which weigh on their lives as individuals or as a community.²⁸ The meetings may in time become a catalyst for political action aimed at local or national government, or designed to put pressure on international bodies or multinational corporations. They can lead to campaigns to influence electoral outcomes, or court cases seeking redress for social injustices through the judicial system. In fact, law courts have become increasingly important as arenas where social movements can take the initiative, alongside more traditional political forums.

A similar shift in the terrain of struggle can be seen in the worldwide development of movements for indigenous rights. A case in point is the Hokkaido Ainu Association in Japan.²⁹ Founded in 1930, the Association

²⁸ For example, Canieso-Doronila, pp. 88–91; Angeles Guanzon-Lapena and Robert Javier Jr., 'The Influence of an NGO on the Political Culture of a Community', in Diokno, pp. 273–89.

²⁹ See Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*, London 1996; Hokkaido Utari Kyokai, ed., *Ainu Shi: Katsudo Hen*, Sapporo 1994, p. 1186; Ogawa Sanae and Ogawa Ryukichi, 'Ainu neno an Ainu', in Nishida Keiichi et al., *Hokkaido to Shosha Minzoku*, Sapporo 1986, pp. 155–208.

lapsed into inaction in the years from 1937 to 1946, but revived in the early postwar era and continues even today to play a leading role in the movement for indigenous rights. In its earlier years it lobbied the government to improve welfare provision and lift the repressive 'protective legislation' around Ainu affairs. Closer to home it ran campaigns to promote education, hygiene, and better housing. In the post-war period, the movement began to show an increasing interest in the preservation of Ainu cultural traditions. During the late 1960s a younger generation was heavily influenced by the US civil rights movement, as well as student radicalism both in Japan and abroad. Then in the 1980s, another shift in the orientation of the Association occurred, as the worldwide spread of groups fighting for indigenous rights opened up new opportunities for international contacts and exchange of ideas. In 1987 the Association began to take an active part in the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations. Although Ainu activists had long recognized the parallels between their own situation and that of aboriginal peoples in the Americas and the Antipodes, these horizontal links added a new dimension in the lived world of the Ainu: the consciousness of belonging to a worldwide community of indigenous peoples.

This shift of perspective brought particular aspects of their historical condition into sharper focus. For what took place was not simply a turn toward identity politics. The Ainu movement seeks not just to preserve traditional ways of life, but also to challenge dominant conceptions of property, sovereignty and nationhood with an alternative vision of land rights and resource utilization. Thus the statement submitted by the Association to the UN Working Group rejected the legal and moral basis of the annexation of Ainu territories—Hokkaido, the Chishima islands and Southern Karafuto—during the 18th and 19th centuries. The movement has also questioned official definitions of a people [*minzoku*] which have been used to deny the Ainu that status, and therewith the right to self-determination.³⁰ What examples like these suggest is the importance of social movements for the articulation of group identities, and the development of multiversal linkages. While some will lobby within the forums of local, national or international politics, and often in more than one forum at once, almost all work on the terrain closest to the lived world of their participants, encouraging them to perceive their everyday

³⁰ *Hokkaido Utari Kyokai*, pp. 964–73 and 1174–81.

lives in a new light, to connect their own experiences with complex systems beyond them, and to project their aspirations to wider audiences. The lesson commonly learnt is that knowledge, welfare and power are indissociable.

But in the multiversal politics of the lived world, it is no simple matter to create shared stories, devise strategies for collective action and find significant pressure points in the global order. Social movements do not spring into being fully formed, but grope their way uncertainly into a dimly perceived world, discovering and creating the rules as they go along. Many are short-lived; many lose momentum and direction; most fail. Mere applause for the multiplication of groups committed to the causes of human rights, indigenous self-determination or sustainable development fails to register the problems they face. For the proliferation of 'new social movements' is just one side of the story. The other side lies in the nature of their connexion with old political institutions, national or local governments, or (somewhat newer) transnational bureaucracies. The vexed issue here, of course, is how far non-governmental movements should collaborate with governments. Arguments over it have been especially heated in countries like the Philippines, where democratic reforms since the late 1980s have opened up new spaces for cooperation between state and civil society. The Filipino constitution of 1987 specifically enjoins the state to 'encourage non-governmental, community-based or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation'.²¹ A number of local governments, most notably the authorities in Naga City, have also taken the initiative to draw civic movements into schemes for urban social reform, offering them a chance to have a real effect on the shaping of policies.²² But at the same time, the participation of NGOs in official bodies like President Estrada's recent National Anti-Poverty Commission has generated intense controversy among social movements about the prospects for engaging in 'critical cooperation' with the state without being co-opted by it. The same dilemma is also emerging at the international level, as bodies like the World Bank and IMF enter into ostensible dialogue with NGOs over the direction of their policies.

²¹ Quoted in Jorge Tigno, 'Democratization through Non-Governmental People's Organizations', *Kasarinlan*, no. 3, 1993, p. 66.

²² See Soliman Santos Jr., ed., *The Theory and Practice of Peoples' Councils. Focus on the Naga City Model*, Manila 1998.

Even when political regimes do not view social movements with much warmth, neo-liberal principles have encouraged governments to transfer some of their traditional functions to voluntary agencies, in new modes of collaboration between government and non-governmental groups. Here the tension between empowerment and cooption is particularly acute. In Japan recent enthusiasm for participation in voluntary social action has been assiduously fostered by officialdom. In many instances—as in the wake of the Kobe earthquake—the ‘volunteer boom’ reflects a genuine desire by the politically powerless to create their own social agenda in a vacuum left by bureaucratic rigidity and neglect. But state-sponsored efforts to improve communal welfare by tapping this ‘volunteer spirit’ cannot but evoke uncomfortable echoes of wartime policies of civilian mobilization, when non-governmental groups were used to brigade citizens to dedicate themselves to the greater good of the Empire. As Nakano Toshio observes, the fact that participation in NGO activities is spontaneous and well-motivated does not necessarily safeguard participants from becoming enmeshed in schemes to shore up the existing edifices of power. The key question is not whether social organizations are ‘non-governmental’ but whether they encourage critical reflection by members on their own position within national and transnational power structures.³³

Barefoot reaction—social movements and ideological conflict

We also need to look more closely at certain—often neglected—types of ‘new social movement’ whose programmes for social change are a far cry from benign images of transnational civil society or grassroots democracy. A desire to control one’s lived world, after all, is not peculiar to oppressed and marginalized groups. It can be just as strong among groups that feel their hold on power—even a modicum of power—under threat from the dynamics of global capitalism. Empowerment here typically means bids to reinforce imperilled boundaries of racial, class or religious belonging and exclusion. Lash and Urry argue that the new social movements of the 1980s and 1990s include ‘reactionary neo-tribalisms’ as well as the more ‘progressive’ forces represented by green or feminist groups. Their analysis, however, offers a rather reassuring

³³ Nakano Toshio, ‘Borantia Dōinkei Shimin Shakairon no Kansei’, *Gendai Shisō*, no. 5, 1999.

spatial boundary between the two. A 'disorganized capitalism', as they describe it, divides the world into 'tame zones' populated by dense networks of information and communication, and 'wild zones' that are more sparsely networked, where 'aesthetic (and other) resources are thin on the ground'. It follows that 'race-baiting neo-tribes' are most likely to emerge in 'wild zones' like East Germany, while progressive 'invented communities' will typically appear in 'tame zones'.⁴

In reality, however, 'reactionary neo-tribalisms' are not geographically separated from other forms of social movement. All sorts of movements may share the same space, use similar techniques of mobilization and even battle for the allegiance of the same groups of people. For in a complex web of intersecting lived worlds, there are many who do not stand unequivocally on the ground of either 'oppressors' or 'oppressed', but traverse both: being at once—say—'woman' and 'middle class professional', 'migrant' and 'entrepreneur', 'indigenous' and 'citizen of a world power'. While some movements try to forge new identities and to win recognition for suppressed forms of knowledge, others seek to buttress existing national or ethnic barriers and to reassert established certainties. The shifts of terrain that have marked the emergence of reforming movements are often mirrored in the evolution of racist or xenophobic forces. Conventional groups on the far right, with tight organizational hierarchies, tend to be replaced by diffuse networks of populist nationalism. A recent example was the upsurge of support for the white nativism of Pauline Hanson in Australia. Although her One Nation Party adopted a structure reminiscent of an orthodox political organization, it used techniques characteristic of a 'new social movement', relying on small gatherings of supporters around the country who were encouraged to recount their own experiences, to build up a common sense of embattled identity. The historian Henry Reynolds observes that what participants in these gatherings wanted was "validation" and confidence in their own ideas and values'. In effect they wished to reaffirm the status of their re-articulated stories as 'cultural capital' in a world where (they believed) these had become devalued. Hanson's rhetoric, and the response she provoked, enabled audiences that were largely made up of relatively elderly working class or self-employed people from small rural towns, to feel 'brought back into

⁴ *Economics of Sign and Space*, p. 318.

the political system; they feel re-enfranchised; their potency has been restored.’³⁵

A similar pattern can be seen in Japan, where the latest nationalist movements like the Society for History Textbook Reform [*Atarashii Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*], created in 1996, operate in a very different fashion from previous neo-nationalist groups. Although its ostensible aim is to lobby for the rewriting of Japan’s school history text-books, which it condemns for presenting a ‘masochistic’ view of Japanese history, the Society works more widely to promote a sense of ethno-national pride amongst its members, and to uphold the superiority of ‘Japanese cultural tradition’ in the face of threatening globalization and domestic social malaise. Its techniques of mobilization include mass meetings and postcard campaigns, where supporters are encouraged to submit their suggestions and share their experiences of ‘censorship’ or ‘brainwashing’ at the hands of a perfidious ‘cosmopolitan elite’.³⁶ The movement has also garnered much publicity from the best-selling comic books of one of its leading members, *manga* writer Kobayashi Yoshinori, and makes extensive use of the Internet, both through its own home page and those created by its supporters. As Kang Sangjung and Yoshimi Shunya argue, in contemporary Japan the evolution of neo-nationalism, like the more cosmopolitan trends of youth culture, is driven ‘more by the daily emotions of “ordinary people” and the mass consumption of images than by the words and deeds of the elite or by a few opinion-making journals.’³⁷

Rethinking social movements

The contemporary evolution of social movements cannot be explained as a shift towards a de-materialized politics of ‘self-actualization’, nor as a benign transcendence of old ideological divisions. In the world of global capitalism, struggles for empowerment are being waged by movements

³⁵ Henry Reynolds, ‘Hanson and Queensland’s Political Culture’, in Robert Manne et al., *Two Nations: The Causes and Effects of the Rise of the One Nation Party in Australia*, Melbourne 1998, p. 146; see also Margo Kingston, ‘On the Campaign Trail with Pauline Hanson’ in *ibid.*, pp. 103–13.

³⁶ See for example Atarashii Kyōkasho and Tsukuru Kai, eds., *Atarashii Nihon no Rekishi ga Hajimaru*, Tokyo 1997.

³⁷ Kang Sangjung and Yoshimi Shunya, ‘Konseika Shakai e no Chōsen: Gurobaruka no naka no Kōkyō Kūkan o Motomete’, *Sekai*, June 1999, p. 170.

which operate simultaneously in several political dimensions—often combining conventional forms of political lobbying with other kinds of action, that include pressure on international organizations and appeals to the courts. At stake here, increasingly, are the meanings of globalized rules of conduct. Contests over these can now acquire all the intensity of struggles for existence, for they are waged over often barely visible yet highly unequal terms of encounter and exchange between multiple lived worlds. But this is not necessarily a politics which opens paths to greater justice, equality or emancipation. The fact that social movements are ‘non-governmental’ or that they operate multiversally does not guarantee that they will work in favour of the marginalized and disadvantaged. Their motive can equally well be to guard established preserves of power and privilege from those who demand to share them; their energies may be mobilized by governments or state agencies—like the US military—to prop up existing structures of power.

Often such movements will embody a finely-balanced ambivalence—impulses to enlarge the spheres of social justice, checked or overwhelmed by the tendency to fall back into narrow self-justification. Which way the balance tips depends on the contested and hazy interface between the realms of the ‘governmental’ and the ‘non-governmental’—on the chances of an interaction that does not sap the independence of social movements. Critical too is the way the members of a movement define their common identity: how they draw the borders of belonging and exclusion, and identify the targets of their opposition. In parts of Australia the One Nation Party competes with alternative social movements that seek to define the problem of rural decline, not around an embattled ‘traditional’ Anglo-Australian identity, but around an unequal distribution of resources between city and country that affects rural Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities alike. Such contests over the identities and borders of social movements assume increasingly palpable intensity. Ideology has not come to an end, but has spread out through the capillaries of the lived world, into the spaces of popular language and mass culture, household and workplace, market and mall. These are the arenas that now challenge the categories of social theory and the practice of politics in everyday life.

T. J. CLARK

ORIGINS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS

I HAVE BEEN READING Perry Anderson's descriptions of the state we are in, and his efforts to discover the whys and wherefores of that state—its origins, as he unrepentantly puts it—for thirty-five years. I can see the pale yellow cover of the copy of *NLR* containing his early essay, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', in my mind's eye as I write; the colour plunges me back immediately, vividly, into the mix of feelings that the essay stirred up the first time I read it. The stakes were high then, or so we thought; and the disagreements deep—about how to frame an explanation of the crisis that, in 1964, was unexpectedly upon us; and, above all, about how to frame an effective response. In what follows I want to talk about Anderson's recent work *The Origins of Postmodernity* and its treatment of art—especially, its characterization of modernism and its account of the circumstances in which modernism came to an end.¹ I want to avoid another version of the 'Does post-modernism deserve the name?' debate, which I am sure has been mostly sterile. The fact that it is now fashionable to answer No to the question is no more significant than the fact that five years ago it was hard not to answer Yes. The question may turn out to have been the wrong one all along. Maybe it was the wrong one because it necessarily pointed to too many, too disparate phenomena at once—too many instances and levels—with no stable sense of separations and determinations among them. Or maybe that instability was its strength—the structure of the investigation taking, and giving form to, the special necessities of the matters being grappled with.

I do not know. I want to try to remain an agnostic on this question. All I assume is that we want a set of descriptions that goes some way to accounting for some specific turn—some rearrangement of features, maybe some deeper shift in presuppositions and procedures—in the visual and verbal culture of the past thirty years. And I assume that this turn has to do *with* modernism—with turning it, or turning it against itself, or turning away from it (but even that turning away is not fully conceivable except as something done to a past that tries to prevent its happening, still insists on facing the turning away, still wants the post- as its own posterity). So a great deal depends, it follows, on getting modernism right; on pointing to what it is in modernism that postmodernism still has to do with, like it or not; and finally, crucially, what it was about the circumstances of modernism that changed, some time in the 1950s and 1960s—Anderson says '[it] was not until the turn of the seventies that the ground for an altogether new configuration was prepared'—*enough* for the older configuration's hold, its continual facing ahead, to relax.

Here, to remind you, are the lineaments of modernism as Anderson presents them. He has in mind primarily the European modernisms of the *fin de siècle* and the first thirty-or-so years of the last century. They are best understood, he says,

as the outcome of a field of force triangulated by three coordinates: an economy and society still only semi-industrial, in which the ruling order remained to a significant extent agrarian or aristocratic; a technology of dramatic interventions, whose impact was still fresh or incipient, and an open political horizon, in which revolutionary upheavals of one kind or another against the prevailing order were widely expected or feared. In the space so bounded, a wide variety of artistic innovations could explode—symbolism, imagism, expressionism, cubism, futurism, constructivism: some quarrying classical memory or patrician styles, others drawn to a poetics of the new machinery, yet others fired by visions of social upheaval; but none at peace with the market as the organizing principle of a modern culture—in that sense, virtually without exception anti-bourgeois.¹

Anderson has interesting things to say by way of qualifying this broad characterization. He builds in a sense of geographical differences and

¹ Originally presented as a paper at a symposium of the Centre for Social Theory and Comparative History at UCLA.

² Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, Verso: London 1998, p. 81.

exceptions—notably (as usual) he recognizes the peculiarity of the English. He no longer believes that it was all up with modernism in 1945—the strange career of post-Surrealist, post-Expressionist avant-gardism in New York, and even Paris and Copenhagen, in the 1950s now looks more convincingly a part of modernism (less a last gasp or rote repetition) than it did to him fifteen years ago. But he sticks to the main lines of his picture, particularly of modernism's enabling conditions: a bourgeois industrial order existing cheek-by-jowl with its outmoded but stubborn opposites—the village, the peasant, the dense cultural remains of aristocracy; an arriving world of mechanical wonders still, in its very newness and incompleteness, invested with the 'charisma of technique'; and the presence of revolution, as an actuality or a pervasive myth.

Modernism's end

His account of modernism's *disabling* conditions seems to me to follow rather closely from this previous account. Postmodernism is again a field 'triangulated . . . by three new historical coordinates'. Modernism was the product of a bourgeois society in which a bourgeoisie still struggled for cultural self-definition in face of its feudal, aristocratic other; one in which the sheer extremity of that struggle for self-definition forced the bourgeoisie to declare itself as a specific locus of cultural authority. One thinks of Barthes's great normative definition of the bourgeoisie as 'the class that does not wish to be named', and realizes that Anderson is painting a picture of a necessarily exceptional and transient moment of the bourgeoisie's self-positing. Postmodernism happens when that self-positing comes to an end—when 'the bourgeoisie as Baudelaire or Marx, Ibsen or Rimbaud, Grosz or Brecht—or even Sartre or O'Hara—knew it, is a thing of the past.'³ This begins with a vengeance after 1945—though the way had certainly been prepared by Fascism. And once 'democratization of manners and disinhibition of mores' have really done their work of symbolic pseudo-levelling, once 'a general *encanaillement* of the possessing classes' has overtaken the older, embarrassing, Bourdieu-type signs of distinction, the game, for modernism, is up. It has no adversary. Its endless riffs and deformations of the aristocratic legacy—the very legacy the bourgeoisie was struggling at the same time to turn to its own purposes—came to mean nothing, to have less and less critical force,

³ *Origins*, pp. 85–6.

because the bourgeoisie had abandoned the struggle, and finally settled (as it always wanted to) for purely instrumental reason.

Thus coordinate one. Coordinate two is the routinization of technique, and the saturation—the internal structuring—of the cultural field by ‘perpetual emotion machines, transmitting discourses that are wall-to-wall ideology, in the strong sense of the term.’⁴ Television is the key technology here: and still, curiously, the matrix of the new apparatus of symbol management, and self-management via the symbol. Call this the colonization of everyday life—the arrival of the society of the spectacle. Where once the nature of bourgeois rationality had been congealed into specific pieces or dreams of equipment—specific invasions of the body or the landscape by this or that network or instrument, monstrous or wonderful or most likely a mixture of both—now the new nature was everywhere and nowhere, producing the very forms in which it would be conceivable. There was no outside to the imaginary any more; or rather, no inside—no critical distance possible in the space between its terms. ‘Image’, ‘body’, ‘landscape’, ‘machine’—these (and other) key terms of modernism’s opposing language are robbed of their criticality by the sheer rapidity of their circulation in the new image-circuits, and the ability of those circuits to blur distinctions, to flatten and derealize, to turn every idea or delight or horror into a fifteen-second vignette.

Coordinate one: the new nature of class power. Coordinate two: the new nature of its technical instrumentation. Coordinate three (does this follow from the other two, or is it a coordinate with its own specific history and force?): ‘the cancellation of political alternatives’—the end of the long epoch of revolutionary myths and challenges to bourgeois society on which modernism had fed.

Politics of the spectacle

You will gather from the way I have presented this argument that there is a lot of it I agree with. Some of its stresses—particularly on the necessity of coming to terms with the new forces and relations of symbolic production in bourgeois society, and their implications for a future anti-capitalist politics—have seemed to me essential to thinking again about

⁴ *Origins*, p. 89.

capitalism ever since they were first formulated, and I encountered them, in the mid-1960s. If I may sound, very briefly, a micro-historical note (bringing us back for a moment to the world of 'Origins of the Present Crisis', etc.), it strikes me as odd that Anderson leans as heavily as he does—and inevitably, rightly so—on the concept of 'the society of the spectacle' while never naming its author (in a book where names are named insistently), and choosing to dismiss the particular context of revolutionary theory and practice from which the concept emerged—that is, the later Situationist International—as 'condemn[ed] to the hazards, and transience, of any overpoliticization.'⁵ This indeed revives the mixed feelings with which I read *New Left Review* in 1964. For the 'overpoliticization' struck me then as simply a *politicization*, of a group of people (some of them previously 'artists') whose encounter with the conditions of production of the image, and the nature of the changes overtaking that production, had led them to realize that the realm of the image was, increasingly, the social location in which and against which a possible future 'politics' would have to be framed. That the politicization resulting from this had its febrile and precarious sides, no one but a fool would deny. But part of the reason for that extremity, I am sure, was isolation—that is, the refusal of most of the rest of the Left at the time to entertain the idea that the ground and form of the 'political' was shifting, maybe terminally, in ways that put the Left's most basic assumptions in doubt.

The origins of postmodernity were a matter of active theory and practice, then—and of active avoidance and choosing not to notice—at the moment of origins. The valedictory, hard-headed, anti-denunciatory, 'own-up-to-the-power-of-the-image' tone of much writing on postmodernism—including Jameson's, at moments—would be easier to warm to if it were not so decidedly a realism after the event.

Enough. My subject here had better be modernism, not the society of the spectacle. I have various, overlapping things to say about Anderson's characterization of it, and no very clear sense of the order they should go in—or of whether what seem to me various different things will turn out to be just different ways of saying the same thing. Plenty of previous

⁵ *Origins*, p. 84. For more on these issues see D. Nicholson-Smith and T. J. Clark, 'Why Art Can't Kill The Situationist International', *October*, no. 79, winter 1997.

commentators, including Alex Callinicos, have pointed out that descriptions of postmodernism almost invariably thrive on a kind of blindness to the presence within *modernism* of the very features that are supposed to make postmodernism what it is. 'Virtually every aesthetic device or feature attributed to postmodernism—*bricolage* of tradition, play with the popular, reflexivity, hybridity, pastiche, figurality, decentering of the subject—could be found', as Anderson puts it, in the previous regime of representation. 'No critical break was discernible.'⁶

I want to push this line of analysis further. For of course (as Callinicos realizes) it is no kind of answer to the argument for postmodernism's specificity simply to list those features it shares with its predecessor. Any new regime of representation will be made out of the debris—the unrealized capacities, the opportunities offered for reinfection and reversal—of the regime it displaces. Again, the example of the bourgeoisie's long (for a while, it seemed truly interminable) love-hate relationship with the forms of aristocracy comes to mind. It is still open to us to say that finally, or sufficiently, those features borrowed and travestied from the predecessor crystallize into a genuinely new order. They are put to new purposes. Their problems and objects are recognizably different.

So the only sufficient answer to Anderson and Jameson would turn on a demonstration not just that modernism and postmodernism share 'devices and features', but that their purposes, problems and objects are essentially the same—they stand in the same central, undecidable relation of ambivalence toward the main forms of modernity, of bourgeois industrial society. I am inclined to think this is true. Remember, as a preliminary orientation, that Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* was not a book that proposed a *periodization* of capitalism. It deliberately did not say when 'the spectacle' arrived. The spectacle was a logic and an instrumentation inherent in the commodity economy, and in certain of its social accompaniments, from the very beginning. No doubt that logic became clearer as the instrumentation became more efficient and widespread—why else the peculiar mixture of lucidity and desperation to Debord's very tone? But the logic had always been relatively clear, and the instrumentation notable—in a sense, pervasive. Why else *The Society of the Spectacle's* epigraph from Feuerbach? What else did its author think Marx was pointing to in his account of 'the fetishism of commodities'?

⁶ *Origins*, p. 80

Modernism, to repeat, was already characterized by a deep, truly undecidable doubleness of mind in the face of the main forms of modernity. And that doubleness was *constitutive*; since modernism is a name not for a stance of Left or Right insurgency or negation, but for a pattern of artistic practice in which modernity's very means of representation—the structure of symbolic production and reproduction within it—are put to the test of exemplification in a particular medium. That is to say, one can never be certain of modernism's 'attitude' to the appearance and logic of modernity because modernism itself was never certain—because it could not have put modernity to the test in the way it did without bracketing overall 'judgement' of what it took on until such judgement was *given in the act (the whole structure) of representation itself*. Certainly Adorno's great 'Teach the petrified forms how to dance by singing them their own song' is modernism's motto. But for that very reason it is always the question with modernism whether the process of singing will petrify the singer, or lead (as it were, *at the very moment of petrification*, at the moment when modernism's technicality is about to become the full mirror-image of technical rationality in general) to a discovery of the joints and sutures in the stone. So that the statues—the forms, the fetishes—do finally creak into motion.

Testing representations

Modernism was a form of testing—of modernity and its modes. The modes were put to the test by being materialized, by being reduced to a set of actual, technical manoeuvres; but more than that, by being forced and denatured in the process, in order to see how much of the modes survived the extremes of dispersal and emptying, flattening and abstraction, estrangement and de-skilling—the procedures that strangely, in modernism, *became what materialization was*. Modernism was *forcing*, in other words; and, needless to say, that forcing had its moment of freezing and idealizing—what Adorno called its regressive moment—as the necessary other to the annihilating or abysmal ones. Take the motif of the machine and the mechanized (and beyond it the wider problematic of rationalization and standardization) which Anderson rightly recognizes as central. Is it the case, as he takes it to be, that modernism necessarily posited the machine as an arriving, transforming entity, as opposed to the sign of a wider, previously embedded logic? Did modernism always fall prey to the charisma of technique (even the charisma of its *own* technique)? I wonder. For every Ozenfant there seems to me

to be a Picabia; for every Schröder House an Einstein Tower; for every *Monument to the Third International* a *Merzbau* enfolding its Cathedral of Erotic Misery—or indeed, directly answering Tatlin's *Monument*, Hausmann's sardonic-domestic *Tatlin at Home*. That is to say, for every sweet dream of rationality, a nightmare vision of the iron cage. For every smug act of gloating at a decentered, pseudo-mechanical subject in the making (much of mid-period Duchamp comes to mind), a Kafka to give us the actual, syntactical movement—the movement of horror and self-loss—of an ordinary 'modern' individual on his or her way to living death. For every De Stijl a Dada; or a De Stijl going Dada (discovering Dada at the heart of De Stijl); or a Dada forced, seemingly by the logic of its own hyper-individualism, toward a weird parody—but in the end is it even a parody?—of Constructivism. I am describing actual trajectories here, actual hybrids at the heart of modernism: Schwitters, for instance, or El Lissitzky, or Van Doesburg.

The invisible bourgeoisie

You see, I hope, where my argument is going. The closer I look at modernism, the more I come to doubt the picture of its relation to the charisma of the machine on which Anderson's coordinate two depends. On one level this is a matter of empirical disagreement about this or that modernist artifact or frame of belief. And the same kind of factual arguments could be brought to bear on the other two points of Anderson's triangulation. Maybe the postwar period really did see a specific levelling and dis-identification of the bourgeoisie. Anderson's language is vivid and persuasive about the detail of that disappearance. But was such a disappearance constitutively new? Did it mean modernism was face to face with a subject—a social formation—it had previously never had in its sights? I doubt it. Again, I go back to Barthes's definition—to the notion of the bourgeoisie as, by its very nature as a class, a constant flickering in and out of social visibility, a permanent, endlessly inventive *société anonyme*. I would say that Barthes was on to something fundamental here, which theorists of capitalist culture have not yet fully pursued. And the presence or absence of the bourgeoisie—its positivity but deep concealment—is one of modernism's defining, indeed constitutive, subjects, from *A Burial at Ornans* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet* on. For what was modernity except that set of forms in which a certain ruling class attempted to universalize its power, by having that power simply *be* individual freedom, or technical rationality, or the one as condition of the

other? And what else is modernism but a continual encounter with just that effect of representation? Is it even the case—I move on to coordinate three—that the end of effective political opposition to capitalism robbed modernism of one of its necessary supports? Had modernism not constantly (again, constitutively) lived precisely with such an ending? Did it not thrive, in France at the turn of the century, in the face of bourgeois society's most hideous positivity? And did it not feed deep, exactly in its pre-war heyday, on the worst kinds of Rightist vitalism, mysticism and racism? (Far more deeply, as I see it, by 1910–14, than ever it had fed on Kropotkin or Jules Guesde.) In what sense were the years between the two great wars not *already* an ending—a crushing and freezing of revolutionary energies? I know that Anderson and I are never going to agree about whether the Communism of the Third International lives up to that last description. But we can agree that modernism—actual modernists—disagreed about exactly this issue, this sense of modernism's political situation, as the Communism of the Third International went through its various loathsome mutations. For every Léger there was a Jean Vigo, for every El Lissitzky a Malevich, for every Heartfield an Attila József. And is not the point about modernism, once again, that *in practice* even the work of Stalinism's great modernist camp-followers opened the immobility and flatness of the Third International's image of socialism to scrutiny—to possible dismantling and remaking? Do not El Lissitzky's absurd, marmoreal photomontages of the 1930s, or Heartfield's desperate parallel efforts to dislodge Hitler and celebrate the Soviet New Man, or even Frida Kahlo's last mad, pathetic attempts at an overt Stalinist *icon*: do not all of these *speak* to the very crushing and fixing of possibilities they try to negate?

Continuities

Again, I return to the wider logic of the case. It is not an answer to the idea of postmodernism simply to say that the modernist field contained many of the same procedures and proposals. The question is: Were those procedures and proposals formative? Were they already what gave modernism its shape, its dynamic? None of my counterexamples would matter, in other words, if I did not believe they added up, finally, to another account of modernism's whole situation. By 'situation' I mean not just the movement's undecidable social place in relation to a visible-and-invisible bourgeoisie (whose visibility and invisibility it continually chose to recognize and not recognize), but also, more deeply, its sense

of the means at its disposal in the face of modernity—what it had to do, what technical or material logic it had to follow, what political or critical vantage point *it might have to deny itself*, to keep the possibility of representation alive. To put it in a nutshell (to speak to the founding father) I do not see that Warhol's ascesis of 'attitude', or collapse of distance, or atony or impenetrability, does other than continue a tactic—but it is more than a tactic, it is a structural necessity—that had made modernism what it was.

Once or twice in his recent essays Fredric Jameson has turned specifically to *defining* modernism, and not surprisingly he has gone back to Adorno for help—to Adorno and Hegel. 'For us,' he quotes Hegel's great dictum, 'art no longer counts as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself.' The task of the critic, Jameson says, is to understand why the prediction about art practice that seemed to follow from the dictum—that art, as a significant form of life, would end, or decline into mere decorative accompaniment—did not prove to be true. Something called modernism happened instead. 'What did not conform to Hegel's prognosis was the supersession of art by philosophy itself: rather, a new and different kind of art appeared to take philosophy's place after the end of the old one, and to usurp all of philosophy's claims to the Absolute, to being "the highest mode in which truth manages to come into being". This was the art we call modernism.'⁷ Or again, in 'Transformations of the Image',

what distinguishes modernism in general is not the experimentation with inherited forms or the invention of new ones . . . Modernism constitutes, above all, the feeling that the aesthetic can only fully be realized and embodied where it is something more than the aesthetic . . . [It is] an art that in its very inner movement seeks to transcend itself as art (as Adorno thought, and without it being particularly important to determine the direction of that self-transcendence, whether religious or political).⁸

These are key episodes in Jameson's text. Very often the moments at which he returns specifically to Adorno are those where the stakes of his whole analysis come clear. And these recent ones are clarifying. They allow me to state my basic disagreement with Jameson's picture of modernism and whatever happened to it in the last thirty years—with

⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, London 1998, p. 83.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101–2.

Jameson's picture, and, I think, Anderson's. For the stress here on modernism as turning on a repeated claim, or effort, to transcend itself as art—its belief, to quote Jameson again, 'that in order to be art at all, art must be something beyond art'⁹—seems to me exactly half the story. It is, if you like, a stress *out of* Adorno's dialectic, which leaves unspoken—and therefore in the end demotes—the other, equally essential moment to Adorno's account. For surely transcendence in modernism can only be achieved—is not this central to our whole sense of the movement's wager?—by way of absolute immanence and contingency, through a deep and ruthless materialism, by a secularization (a 'realization') of transcendence—an absorption in the logic of form. Jameson's modernism, that is to say, seems to me posited as a movement of transcendence always awaiting *another*, a distinct, movement (indeed, moment) at which there will take place, punctually, 'the dissolution of art's vocation to reach the Absolute'.¹⁰ And this great, ultra-Enlightenment imagining of disabusal, of the stars coming down to earth, is of course what gives Jameson's vision its force. But supposing (as I think Adorno supposed) that modernism was *already* that dissolution and disabusal—but exactly a dissolution held in dialectical tension with the idea or urge to totality, which idea or impulsion *alone gave the notion of dissolution* (or emptying, or ascesis, or fragment, or mere manufacture, or reduction, or deadpan, or non-identity) *sense*.

From this picture of modernism there would follow, I feel, a different appraisal of the last thirty years. I guess it would turn on the question of whether, or to what extent, the figures of dissolution and disabusal in art practice—the familiar figures I have just listed—became *themselves* a form of transcendence; and, as always within modernism, a transcendence doomed to collapse. Or rather, not so much 'doomed to collapse' as simply to be confronted again with the pathos lying at the heart of disabusal—disabusal (true secularization) as one more aesthetic mirage among others, always looming ahead of modernism in the commodity desert, as a form of lucidity it never quite reaches. Warhol, inevitably, is for me increasingly the figure of this. How handmade and petty-bourgeois his bright world of consumer durables now looks! How haunted still by a dream of freedom! So that his *Campbell's Soup Can* appears, thirty years on, transparently an amalgam—an unresolved, but naively

⁹ *The Cultural Turn*, p. 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

MICHAEL MAAR

THE ORDEALS OF FIRE AND WATER

IN THE LAST WEEK of his life Marcel Proust did something which baffles critics to this day. Only a decade ago, it was discovered that he deleted two-thirds of the typescript of *Albertine Disparue*. Although his intention remains unclear, there is one clue that suggests death interrupted him in the midst of a major revision. At the climax of this section of his work Proust lets the conclusion of a plot stand whose beginning is missing and had to be restored posthumously by his brother from the manuscript. The denouement is incomprehensible without the twists in the narrative that precede it; so Proust would have had either to reintegrate the twists or to cut the denouement. If we imagine that he had lived a little longer, and further assume that he would have taken the second course and suppressed both twists and resolution, there would have been a bang somewhere in the universe. For *A la Recherche* would have then lost what might be reckoned its last concession to human frailty: its only patent artistic flaw.

We are in the penultimate volume of the cycle. The narrator Marcel has received a telegram announcing that Albertine—lover, captive, fugitive—has been killed in a riding accident. After a period of mourning in which for an entire gloomy volume Marcel shuts himself up with the reader, he ventures forth into the world again, travelling to Venice in the company of his mother. There he receives another telegram, that reads: 'Dear friend, she whom you thought dead—forgive me—is still very much alive and wishes to see you again to discuss marriage, on your return. All my love Albertine.' How can this be—Albertine alive? Marcel does not doubt the news, but strangely, nor does her resurrection bring

him the joy he might have expected. He examines his feelings and realizes that he is no more capable of reawakening the Albertine of old than his earlier self; that he had been right to fear the monster of amnesia would devour his love; that his love for young girls was in truth only for the dawn whose light for a moment brushed their faces; finally that even our love of life itself is like a past affair from which we cannot free ourselves; but that the idea of death which destroys it can also cure us of the need for immortality.

Wonderful, if also sad. And now comes the one major lapse of Proust's art. The reader is flabbergasted by the possibility that Albertine, from whom he has not been able to detach himself as quickly as the narrator, may still be alive. There is the hint that her accident might have been staged as a ruse, to escape the harassments of Marcel's jealousy, whose long grief therefore was quite misplaced, since he might now be reunited with her. What a prospect! Yet how does the narrator react? He changes the subject and starts to describe the treasures of Venetian art.

No reader in the world, no sentient person, can pay the least attention at this point. However finely depicted, marble mosaics and Carpaccios . . . To hell with them: what about Albertine? Fifteen dazzling, woefully perverse pages later, we find out. She is dead, the telegram was wrongly read, the clerk in the telegraph office had mistaken Gilberte's baroque signature for Albertine's, the offer of marriage was not to Marcel but to Saint-Loup. Not this forced denouement is an affront to the reader, but the virtuoso promenade that precedes it.

Proust's error lies so deep in the craft of writing a novel that even the greatest practitioner cannot always avoid it. He has forgotten that as the author he knows the plan of the novel, but the reader does not. He underestimates the quasi-thriller suspense he has created. Above all, he underestimates how painfully well he has worked, how dear his characters have become to the reader, with how heavy a heart we have taken our leave of Albertine, and so how repugnant the mere idea of her sliding back to life like Lazarus must be. If we already knew that Albertine was not going to be resurrected, we might appreciate Proust's digression as a last cruel demonstration of the laws of the heart, as he intended it. But we don't know. On first reading the novel, we are in a state of innocence into which the author—whose plan has become a

second skin whose every tiny vein he knows—can no longer put himself, even as an experiment.

So Proust also tries to draw the reader into his own depths. He seeks to expel us from our state of innocence. To that end, he has only one resort: to get us to repeat the act. In a famous address his colleague Thomas Mann went further, making it a public requirement. Lecturing to students at Princeton, he openly demanded that they read his fiction of lost time twice. Only then could they truly grasp the musical-ideal complexity of *The Magic Mountain* and scan the symbolic allusion of its key terms in both directions—like music which one must also already know to enjoy properly.

Second reading

Thomas Mann called his demand ‘very arrogant’, but he only voiced what every serious author hopes for. Any writer who does not just produce pulp secretly expects to be read more than once. Re-reading is the thanks deserved by every author who smuggles more into the lines than one can casually absorb. Good, innocent first-time readers—how can they appreciate more than a handful of the treasures an author intends for them? A first reading is like puberty, a somewhat humiliating state through which we must pass to become adult; necessary less for its own sake, than to permit a second and more serious reading, now lucidly alert and delivered from mere curiosity. Without this second, deeper reading, scrupulous authors would labour in vain. No one can know on a first reading what demands particular attention. If it is thrust in our face or trilled from the rooftops, the author is a bungler. Since the reader cannot know how subtly the author has organized his motifs or how closely he has woven his tale, he will inevitably overlook most of this. So long as the ending remains hidden, we can have no more than an inkling of what may be leading up to it, or from how early on. After ten volumes of Proust, the reader has certainly forgotten that the first word of the novel is *longtemps*, to which the last word *temps* curves back. We have followed the narrative line and thought we were proceeding straight ahead; only on a second reading can we discover that the writer has bent this line, and that we are moving back around a huge circle—as in *Finnegans Wake*, whose final word without a full-stop directs us back to the lower case that opens the work. To understand the architecture of a novel and grasp the different levels of its construction, we always

need to re-read it. The overtones and undertones of a work compose a polyphony, not at a first naive quick hearing, but only to a slow, careful listener. Only repeated soundings can tap the lateral passages beneath the surface of a work, and capture the echoes from its catacombs. More even than others, it is Alexandrian writers like Mann or Joyce who beg not to be set aside after the first time. Whoever gives them satisfaction and re-reads them, will find the free flow of aimless details settling into ever stronger channels. In the end almost every last minutia of *Ulysses* or *The Magic Mountain* is embedded in symbol or motif; even the cigars no longer glow so harmlessly, and staid desks or tiled stoves serve more than the comfort of the moribund.

But if we value such novels, is it truly for the stringency of their organization? Or is it rather for those details that strike us straight away—the kidneys Bloom fries for breakfast, the wealth of fish sauces prepared by Frau Stöhr in *The Magic Mountain*, the black floats of *Tous-les-deux* in the garden, the art of keeping warm in camel-hair blankets, the pig-lets blindly drawn on paper by the guests at the Berghof on Walpurgis Night? More generally, do the lasting attractions of a work have much to do with the qualities we register only after we return to it? What is the real difference between a first and second reading?

First reading

Nothing is so underestimated by academic critics as the epistemological value of the first reading of a novel. We know from Borges that every time we look into a book it has changed. His favourite quotation could be turned into the aphorism that you cannot step into the same flow of reading twice. Once only is this change not fluid and metamorphic, but a tiger's leap between categories. On a first reading, our position is like that of the hero of Jean Paul's *Invisible Lodge*, reared underground, stepping for the first time into sunlight for an initiation. Still half blind, perhaps even dazzled, he takes in much more than he ever will later, with a gaze sharpened by knowledge but also dulled by habit. What a first reading lacks is just what gives it an advantage over all others. Its strength lies in not-knowing. With a first reading alone do we watch a world being made; on every later one it lies there finished. Only once will we experience the swirl of currents where knowing and not-knowing meet. Later all is calm, and shrouded in the fog of habit, whose laws we can escape as little as Marcel, who ignores Albertine's return, sets off

for Padua and loses himself in the frescoes of the Giotto Chapel. On a first reading a book can reveal aesthetic truths it will never again surrender. Above all, it is only when we do not know how a work will continue that we can judge its *longueurs*, its breaks and crescendos. When we re-read it, we may see how it functions; but only the first time, whether it does. Proust's blunder, an over-extension of delayed suspense, is to be experienced on a first reading alone. Once we know that Albertine stays dead, we are no longer inclined to protest at the length of time Proust hangs her over the abyss by a hair. Only on this first occasion does a reader have his own rights against an author, for whom it may be hard enough to know, but immensely harder to cease to know, to simulate not-knowing and force himself back to the surface from immersion in his creation.

Besides such mistakes that even Proust could make, there are also magical effects destined exclusively for the first reader. In Proust's judgement the finest passage in *The Sentimental Education* was not a sentence, but a gap. Across five hundred pages Flaubert has conscientiously reported every vicissitude of his hero Frédéric Moreau, eventually conducting him to the scene where he sees a policeman in a riot cut down an insurgent with his sword. The policeman turns round, and to his astonishment Frédéric recognizes an old acquaintance, a former republican. There follow the two words: 'He travelled', and without transition decades pass in a couple of sentences.

What the reader feels at this point is a small icy shock, mixed with vertigo and a sense of triumph. For five hundred pages he has climbed up step by step inside a tower; on reaching the top, Flaubert pulls him onto the parapet and shows him something no one has ever seen before: a glittering stream, pure time shooting past. Five hundred pages of ascending prose were needed for Flaubert to achieve this one effect, the experience of time as revelation and shock. Proust turns the famous blank of *The Sentimental Education* into the jump of the last volume of his own novel, as the narrator returns to the world after being in a sanatorium and sees old friends at a masked ball in white wigs and big red noses, which he only gradually recognizes as the product of the make-up artist called time. The effect can only work once, but at the end of the cycle it is overwhelming. One has lived a life and has grown old. What is most impossible has come to pass. But reading as mimesis of life can no more be repeated than living. It is only once that we read as we live: without

knowing what is going to happen, forced every day to deduce the future from the past with so many transient, procreant hypotheses. Later we read everything from the end; it is the first time we live the tale from the beginning. That is why there is no second time. When one begins for the second time, the death mask has already been removed; the book we shut after the first reading remains closed forever.

The two-fold test

The conclusion to be drawn is simple. A book must pass both readings, to satisfy Nietzsche's 'double optic' which Mann so often quotes. A great novel is bimetallic. If we do not warm to it the first time, and no connexion is made, there will rarely be the second, cold reading, that at any moment can be terminated. Our reading time is too limited. Great fiction withstands two tests, ordeal by fire and ordeal by water. Unlike the hero of the fairy tale, it must start by undergoing the flames. On that first half-blind, yet clear-eyed reading, it must arouse the enthusiasm without which art is worth nothing; on the second and third, it must prove its depths.

The fortunate Taminos are rare among novels. Most works fail both tests: contact does not occur on first reading, and descent into the depths of a second is not worth it. A cut above them are novels which fail only the second test. Such are many titles we devour in youth or childhood, at which we later shrug our shoulders. In a class all of his own is Kafka, who passes the first test brilliantly but drags out the second as opaquely as one of his trials or decrees of the castle.

There are also novels that fail only the first test. The greatest authors, in particular, tend to become lazy as they grow older, and take only the second test seriously. The Joyce of *Dubliners* passes both ordeals with colours flying. *Finnegans Wake*, whose surface is so uninviting only specialists plumb its depths, doesn't even bother to show up for the first test. With Schönberg, modern music too goes truant at the first, where Bartók or the Stravinsky of *The Rite of Spring* shine in both. Compared with such refusals of the ordeal by fire, Thomas Mann's request that *The Magic Mountain* be read twice doesn't seem so arrogant after all—he even qualified it, saying his appeal held only if a reader was not bored the first time. Art, he told his students, should not be a hard grind. Borges, who was quite unlike Mann, said something very similar, in his

case taking aiming at Joyce. If it takes an effort to read something, he remarked, the author has failed.

A great writer saves the reader the effort he makes himself. He will rise perpetually from the depths and read his own work as if it were strange to him. The enigmatic radicalism which moved Proust on the eve of his death to cross out so much of *Albertine Disparue*, was the final reflex of his art of pulling out his old eyes and putting in those of the naive reader. Nature, however, has offered the chance of a second naivety to these. The magic potion which allows renewed enjoyment of a first reading is the reflux of not-knowing, or forgetting. Beckett thought it was just this that made possible the miracle of Proust's novel itself. Proust first had to forget everything in order to be able to let it blossom anew in his memory. Perhaps that is why he is the greatest master of both ordeals, a double being, water-nymph and salamander, of which the reading world has seen very few.

FRANCO MORETTI

NEW YORK TIMES

OBITUARIES

I

IF YOU GO TO NEW YORK, chances are that you will read the *New York Times*, that is to say one of the most overrated papers on earth. But don't miss its truly great page: the *Obituaries*. It's the only section I read every day, because I admire the intention that animates it: to remember. And to do so on a large scale, five, six, eight short biographies per day. Compared to Italian newspapers, which devote a very large space to very few people, the *Obits* have an open, 'democratic' feel: lots of people, of many kinds, and most of them not at all famous. Reading their stories, you are reminded that society is made of different worlds and temporalities: where the 36-year-old choreographer who has just put on his first Broadway show appears next to the 101-year-old man who had fought in 'Palestine', against the Turks, in the Jewish battalion of the British army.

II

What is it that survives then, and makes a life worth remembering? What human beings have done—and no one had done before. Which can mean the most disparate things: in the one random month I decided to scan, it ranged from the creation of the New York Metropolitan Transit Authority to discoveries in the field of neuro-muscular dysfunctions; the invention of the Ajax detergent at Palmolive and the institution of mandatory Art courses at Columbia University; euthanasia, the first American ascent of Mount Everest, and mutual funds; a genetic muta-

tion related to diabetes, the concession of interest on bank accounts, the Goodwill Games, or winning fifty-five million dollars at the Florida lottery (and giving them all to charity).

III

Lots of things. Strange, at times; but all of them truly 'things'. In this page of the dead the air is incredibly concrete—prosaic, even. All facts: of Sheelah Ryan (the lottery winner), we are told what Foundation she created, how its payments are conducted, the name of its director—all the way to the perhaps unavoidable stray cats. We are given the street, the civic number, and the crossroad of every house built in Manhattan by the real estate developer Joseph Blitz. And of Archer Gordon (who joined mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and cardiac massage), we are told about the manikins he constructed with the Norwegian doll-maker, Asmund Laerdul, for use in medical training.

Things. In the sober and vaguely Hegelian world of the *Obits*, there is no room for projects, hopes, ideas: only what has been *realized* counts. And is usually seen, very simply, as an improvement over the past: the only instance in which the *Times* shows a truly Victorian faith in progress. Each individual destiny makes the world a little better—but just a little, because progress is intrinsically made of *small* things: no changes of direction, but a myriad regular steps along a well-known path. So, Joseph DiLeo has 'contributed' to a medical discovery, and Mildred McAfee has 'improved' the position of women in the military; this man has 'enlarged' the family firm, that has 'diversified' it towards oceanic trade, or 'cooperated' to protect American soldiers from malaria, or 'helped perfecting' an emergency technique. Subdivided, microscopic notion of human agency, which recalls Chaunu's pages on eighteenth-century Europe: progress, singular, as the sum of a thousand *progresses*. A quantitative and orderly march: without confusion, and certainly without catastrophes.

IV

The symbol of this progress—gadgets. The small mechanical, electronic and above all pharmaceutical invention. Concrete and measurable

improvements that add up (but slowly!) until you can raise a jet from the ground, or defeat (most) heart attacks. And all signs of a progress without conflict: where the enemy is nature, but never other human beings. In a month, I encounter about fifty politicians, diplomats, religious leaders, local administrators: with a couple of exceptions, they are all on the right side. They have tried to widen civil and political rights, to counter the hidden influence of power, to bring about a more equal legislation; but you are left wondering with whom they had to struggle. The only reactionary flashes are set in the fifties: as if, after McCarthyism, American society had known no division. Even more significant, in a month I don't find a single case of defeat: no one who wanted something profoundly right—and didn't succeed. As if losing, for the *Obits*, were sadder than death itself. And so in the entry on Tomas Fabregas, who died at 36 after a long battle to change the law preventing HIV-positive persons from entering the US, the newspaper omits to add: 'and lost'. Which, in the end, is quite a meaningful fact.

V

Among the many many people who manage to 'improve' their position, an interesting absence: wage labourers. The rights of African-Americans, women, gays, appear every day; those of the workers, never. The term itself appears only once, in the entry on the rabbi Joseph Glaser (who supported many groups, among whom Native Americans, Tibetan exiles, Israelis, and Chicano farm labourers in California). In the economic sphere, progress seems to mean more goods, larger enterprises, financial wizardry, period. The redistribution of income is absent, or better: entirely subsumed under charity. Of twenty or so major businessmen, one third are presented, literally, as 'philanthropists'. (Among them my personal favourite, Samuel Rappaport, 'Philanthropist and Speculator', who spends ten months in a Federal prison for fiscal fraud, but then gives tons of money to hospitals, the Police Sports League, the Israeli state, and the Philadelphia Children's Choir.)

VI

The Philadelphia Children's Choir, for its part, is a good instance of the secret protagonist of the *Obits*: institutions. In these biographies, life

resembles a billiard ball: it bounces from a college to a hospital, from a Foundation to a Centre to a Society to a Club. In the twenty-five lines devoted to Walt Chyzowych, soccer coach, mention is made of ten different clubs and federations: one every fifteen words. Of a song by Major Lance, which apparently gave rise to the 'Chicago Sound', we are told in which two festivals it was performed, and what newspaper mentioned it first; but we're never told what the sound actually sounds like. The music's meaning is not in the music itself, but in the institutions that legitimize it.

Old story. In democratic nations the science of association is the mother of all sciences, wrote Tocqueville. Still, it is striking to see these lives overshadowed by much larger forces, which easily survive them, as if having swallowed all their strength: human beings employed full time in keeping institutions alive, not vice versa.

VII

There is only one sector where this orderly pattern breaks down, and chance resumes its old role: show business. Very wide field (almost half of the entries), and much more varied than one would expect film, of course, but only in about one fifth of the cases; just the same as music, sports and the theatre. In the month I surveyed, the three longest biographies were those of Jessica Tandy (theatre), Jule Styne (musical), and Sister Parish (interior decoration).

Chance: Dennis Morgan is playing a little part in *Carmen*, and 'is noticed by a [Hollywood] talent scout'. Tom Ewell, chosen over Gary Cooper and William Holden to star with Marilyn Monroe, 'was very surprised' (really). The three-year-old Jule Styne, taken to a Harry Lauder show, climbs onto the stage and starts singing (and Lauder tells his parents to buy him a piano). In the world of spectacle, lives are still decided by these spectacular moments: the careful institutional slalom is replaced by sudden agnitions (buy him a piano!). Whence a stronger (if Cinderellesque) sense of social mobility: not the lawyer's son who becomes a congressman (big deal), or the industrialist who opens a bank (ditto), but Vitas Gerulaitis, the son of poor Lithuanian immigrants, who begins as a ball-boy at Forest Hills and ends with two million dollars in tournament money.

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JEFFREY C. ISAAC

INTELLECTUALS, MARXISM AND POLITICS

I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST Alex Callinicos's critique of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu in NLR 236. It is a provocative essay whose ambition and logic epitomizes what is wrong, and what is right, with a certain kind of 'Marxist' critique. Most of what is wrong with it stems from its reductionism and stubborn refusal to interrogate canonical categories. Callinicos does not want to learn from his interlocutors, because he already knows the truth; so his essay is predictable—never an intellectual virtue. On the other hand, armed with his particular truth, Callinicos is incisive and relentless in a critique that rightly identifies the limits of his interlocutors' arguments, but unfortunately stops short before his own.

Callinicos's critique can be summarized as follows: Giddens is a Weberian social theorist who has lost his critical edge and become an ideologist of the Clinton/Blair Third Way. Bourdieu is an iconoclastic social theorist, in the mould of Durkheim, who has moved politically to the left, but remains trapped in a bourgeois discourse of the 'universal intellectual' and social democratic reform. Both theorists fall short of standard Marxist analysis of the contradictions of capitalism in the epoch of post-Fordism and flexible accumulation. Giddens attracts most hostility. *The Third Way*, 'one of the worst books by a leading social theorist', offers a complacent vision of globalization. Bourdieu is presented as the antithesis of Giddens, a crusader like Noam Chomsky who takes the depredations of capitalism seriously and struggles against them in a spirit of Sartrean engagement. But, alas, Bourdieu is limited by his failure to be a Marxist and thus, in good Hegelian fashion, needs to

be *aufgehoben*. Giddens's acceptance of the imperatives of capitalism, and Bourdieu's spirited and well-meaning but merely social democratic opposition to them, find their resolution at a higher level in a vaguely defined Marxism. Indeed, by the end of Callinicos's essay the apparent choice between these three alternatives is dialectically reduced to two, as Bourdieu's ineffectual social democracy is compelled by the force of argument to opt between the others. The first path, writes Callinicos, is to 'adapt to the existing order, seeking marginal improvements inflated by self-deceiving rhetoric. Such, essentially, is the course adopted by Giddens. Alternatively, one can seek to identify and to strengthen the forces capable of challenging the structures of capitalist domination. Bourdieu seems to be groping towards this second option. To do so effectively will require that he seriously engages with the revolutionary Marxist tradition.' Despite the qualifications—what do 'effectively' and 'seriously' mean?—Callinicos leaves no doubt that Bourdieu can rise to the level of authentic critique only by embracing some of the central claims of revolutionary Marxism.

I asserted earlier that Callinicos has no desire to learn from his interlocutors. His attitude is unfortunate, and I have no wish to be similarly dismissive of Callinicos's own argument. In a spirit of serious intellectual engagement, then, having reduced this argument to its basic dialectical logic—to rational kernel—I should say that Callinicos presents a compelling critique of both Giddens and Bourdieu from a Marxist perspective. He effectively demonstrates that neither Giddens nor Bourdieu has a systematic theory of the structures of capitalism, or a strategy capable of breaking with the powerful imperatives of capital accumulation that constrain even the best-intentioned government, as the fate of Oskar Lafontaine illustrates. Callinicos rightly argues that neither writer raises deep questions about 'the viability of the nation-state in an era of globalization,' nor addresses 'the structural limits to the state's responsiveness to pressures from below.' These criticisms come down to the following unimpeachable point: capitalist societies produce insecurity and inequality, and the distribution of power in these societies—structured by both the state and social relations—tends to make it exceedingly difficult to challenge insecurity and inequality, thereby in effect reproducing them.

While both Giddens and Bourdieu have no answer for this, Callinicos prefers the latter because he 'sets himself in frontal opposition'—a rather unGramscian stance—to the effects of capitalism. By comparison with

Giddens, in his eyes Bourdieu at least has the virtue of being militantly, or moralistically, anti-capitalist. But here the key question is this: what does it really mean at the dawn of the twenty-first century to be 'anti-capitalist?' Beyond this, what does it mean to be a 'revolutionary Marxist' or, in Callinicos's phrase, to adopt 'Gramsci's conception of the revolutionary socialist party as the organic intellectual of the working class?' What is the practical point of such avowals—what forces of liberating or even merely remedial transformation do they disclose within the heart of the present?

The need for pragmatism

I believe they amount to very little. Certain Marxian categories of analysis—'flexible accumulation', 'post-Fordism'—are indispensable to intelligent social criticism, although many non-Marxist writers make good use of them as well (for example Richard Sennett in his *Corrosion of Character*). But while Marxism continues to offer insights into features of capital accumulation, it has lost its charm as a revolutionary praxis—that is, as an immanent critique of capitalism that points towards its transcendence by a 'higher' form of society. This is the tragic side of the relationship between theory and practice in Marxism. It has lost whatever 'organic' connection it once had to significant parties and movements. Most importantly of all, naïve confidence in a future beyond commodity production, surplus value, exploitation and alienation is no longer possible. As a slogan or expression of rancorous hostility towards capitalism, and a way of identifying with a historical tradition that had its good—as well as its evil—dimensions, 'revolutionary Marxism' has a point. But as a practical position, it has become pointless. This is demonstrable in the most intelligent and programmatic essays published in *New Left Review* itself, which develop and endorse—as in the case of Robin Blackburn's fascinating study of pension funds—what can only be described as practical experiments within the admittedly unethical and unsatisfying framework of capitalism. Of course these arguments can be chalked up to strategic compromises on the path toward 'revolutionary transformation'. But this would be no more than wishful thinking, for there no longer exists a compelling vision of what such a journey would be like or what would be in store for us at the end of it. Why? Part of the reason lies in political and economic changes; part in the emergence of sources of social division not reducible to class; and part lies in what Jurgen Habermas has called a learning process. The history of violence

in the twentieth century—not least the Communist terror justified by appeals to ‘necessity’ and ‘progress’ that François Furet has analysed so well in *The Passing of an Illusion*—has made many, including on the left, suspicious of appeals to ‘revolution’ of any sort. The demise of the Marxist vision has many causes. But it is now an accomplished fact.

This brings me back to Giddens. Callinicos presents a powerful critique. Giddens is too upbeat about the Third Way. He has too little to say about the obstacles in the real world to the values he espouses, about the deplorable conditions that the Third Way does not and cannot seek to eliminate. Perhaps he has offered too much intellectual credibility to the two-faced policies of Blair and Clinton. These criticisms are apt. But there is nonetheless a truth in Giddens’s analysis that is lacking in both Bourdieu’s moralizing opposition to globalization and Callinicos’s more sophisticated, systematic, yet at the same time religious—indeed almost Kierkegaardian—critique of capitalism. Giddens declares that ‘no one has any alternatives to capitalism’. Now we might not like this, but Giddens is alas correct. Nothing that Callinicos says refutes him. To say this is not to regard contemporary capitalism as a ‘trans-historical feature of human existence’ or ‘second nature’. It is simply to remark that given the history that we have inherited and the world that human beings have created, there exists no credible wholesale alternative to capitalism. The same could be said of water purification, modern medicine, electronic communication, industrial technology with all of its wastes and hazards, and also civil liberties and representative government of some sort. These are all historical achievements, products of human agency we cannot imagine transcending. We could of course attempt, by force—because few who have experienced these things would simply assent—to abolish all of these. But it is hard to conceive what could plausibly be held up as radically different but also better, and it is harder still to imagine that the effort to abolish such modern arrangements would produce anything but great misery.

Capitalism, of course, differs from medicine or civil liberties. For in spite of the consumer advantages it makes available to some—including a not inconsiderable number of inhabitants of advanced industrial societies, and no doubt many keen readers of *New Left Review*—it is a system of thoroughgoing, global inequality. As such it is an evil. But there exists neither a credible idea of what might replace it nor a substantial portion of humankind committed to any ‘universal’ alternative to it. That

is why what Callinicos pejoratively describes as Giddens's 'coming to terms with capitalism' is necessary. Far from being an act of betrayal or intellectual cowardice, such a 'coming to terms' is the only mature and serious course open to us. To come to terms with the world does not mean to accept it as it is, but to approach it with a realistic sense of what is ethically and politically possible. Perhaps we could imagine completely different and better worlds. I regularly encourage my undergraduate students to do this. Much of the literary genre of science fiction is based on such imagining. But a serious, responsible critique that seeks to make this awful, wonderful and tragic earth a better place, must take its bearings from the world that exists. This, after all, was always what Marxism claimed as its principal virtue, though as far back as Karl Korsch critical Marxists themselves began to see that Marxism was less prescient, more partial and constrained by history, than its most fervent adherents were willing to admit. It is precisely in the name of realism and 'materialism' that one must take very seriously the critique of Marxism that Giddens, and many others, have developed. The tragedy of Marxism is that while it retains theoretical insight it lacks ethical credibility and historical power.

This does not mean that all the details of Giddens's argument are correct. To my own mind some are more persuasive than others. But it does mean that Giddens's effort to come to terms with capitalism is the only mature option. Callinicos describes Giddens's work as 'a de-ideologization of politics, as the latter is reduced to problem-solving.' He clearly thinks this a step back, but I believe it is a step forward. I am no defender of Richard Rorty's particular version of it, but the spirit we need is pragmatic—a democratic pragmatism, rooted in the best of Marx, Dewey and others, which abjures grand labels and seeks to use reason and persuasion to make the world a better place. This is problem solving. Over one hundred and fifty years ago Marx proclaimed that communism was the 'riddle of history solved'. For Marx communism—what later came to be called 'revolutionary Marxism'—promised the disappearance of social conflicts and solution of the core problems of human existence. We know now that this was an impossible dream. But to solve some of our problems, to limit some of the most egregious inequalities and indignities that surround us—that is both possible and necessary. Yet the means of doing so are obscure, and the political will is weak. Here lies the challenge for a democratic politics today.



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ALEX CALLINICOS

IMPOSSIBLE ANTI-CAPITALISM?

IT IS UNCLEAR whether Jeffrey Isaac regards the kind of discussion I sought to develop around the recent political interventions of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens as having any legitimacy at all. He seems, first of all, somewhat confounded to discover that Marxists still exist. 'The demise of the Marxist vision' being 'an accomplished fact', he invites us to take our cue from the likes of François Furet and meekly depart the historical stage, leaving progressive politics to those who will, in a spirit of 'democratic pragmatism', devote themselves to 'problem solving'. One might have thought that the very frequency with which the death of Marxism has been announced in the past would have encouraged a certain note of caution here.

Isaac concedes that I provide a 'very compelling critique' of both Giddens and Bourdieu—'from a Marxist perspective'—in arguing that neither 'has either a systematic theory of the structures of capitalism or a strategy capable of obviating the powerful imperatives of capital accumulation.' The qualification is important here: according to Isaac, the perspective from which it is written invalidates my critique. A strange conception of criticism, surely: is not the validity of an argument, or the cogency of an analysis, at least partially independent of the perspective from which it comes?

To begin with Giddens: even those sympathetic to his broad political outlook may still often privately concede that *The Third Way* is a truly awful book (and some have said as much to me).¹ There is no reason why the project of a 'centre-left' alternative to both traditional social democracy and neo-liberalism should not be supported by powerful arguments. David Marquand's *The Unprincipled Society*, for example, or Will Hutton's *The State We're In* represent serious attempts to map out such

an alternative: the conception common to both is a vision of 'stakeholder capitalism', superior in efficiency and equity to the unregulated Anglo-American model. Marquand and Hutton (one Roy Jenkins's *ex-chef de cabinet*, the other recently appointed head of the Industrial Society) are scarcely Bolsheviks, but their attempt to formulate a real programme, rather than a stock of bland, cloying phrases, proved too radical for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Less bracing counsellors have taken their place: Charlie Leadbeater's *Living On Thin Air* (which makes *The Third Way* look like *Das Kapital*) was apparently the toast of Downing Street last year. The intellectual vacuity of such work corresponds to the emptiness at the heart of 'the project' itself, where neo-liberalism has reduced egalitarian commitments to mere rhetoric.³ Nor are things any better across the Atlantic, where Robert Reich has shared the fate of Marquand and Hutton, and where the Clinton-Gore Third Way relies heavily on right-wing Republican Alan Greenspan's management of money markets to keep the Wall Street bubble expanding.

The very shabbiness of official 'centre-left' thinking is one reason why serious strategic discussion on the left remains so important. Isaac wholly misreads the intention of my article, which was to contribute to such discussion, not foreclose it. He says I have 'no desire to learn' from Giddens and Bourdieu. Only a fool could think he or she had nothing to learn from the author of *The Rules of Art* and *Distinction*. One of the main themes of my article was to demonstrate how Bourdieu's political interventions over the past decade have helped to open up a new space for the Left in France. Nor do I think it appropriate to dismiss, as Isaac does, his critique of neo-liberalism as 'moralizing'. It is curious that Isaac, usually so quick to list Marxism's faults, should here endorse its traditional disdain for moral critique. Many Marxists have learned in recent years the importance of articulating and defending their tacit normative commitments. Here Bourdieu can be of help. Perhaps because his earlier work focused on how class is *lived*, on how social differences inhabit the very grain of everyday life, he has proved especially sensitive to the scale of socially unnecessary suffering—what he has called *la*

³ See also Alan Carling's searching critique, which takes as its starting point the values common to both New Labour and the socialist tradition: 'New Labour's Polity: Tony Giddens and the "Third Way"', *Imprints*, 3.3, 1999.

⁴ For a critical assessment of Third Way egalitarianism, see Alex Callinicos, *Equality*, Cambridge 2000, chapters 3 and 4.

misère du monde—produced by market capitalism. His evocation of an ‘economics of well-being’, however unspecified its institutional implications, potentially connects up with Amartya Sen’s development of egalitarian thinking, whose goal is to equalize individuals’ capabilities to engage in valued states and activities.³ Meanwhile, at a more analytical level, Bourdieu’s discussions in *Contre-feux* of insecurity (*précarité*) as a mode of capitalist domination, and the collective research that he and his collaborators have undertaken into the ways in which the media systematically function to suppress serious debate are important contributions to contemporary social theory.

The point I sought nevertheless to make against Bourdieu (and also against Giddens, although, alas, with much less hope of an interesting response) was this: their recent political writings raise certain classical questions about both the limits that capitalist structures place on attempts to regulate them, and about what alternative forms of socio-economic coordination might be needed to remedy capitalist dysfunctions and injustice. I did not say that they were required to endorse the answers of the classical Marxist tradition on these points; all I argued was that for Bourdieu’s critique of neo-liberalism to fulfil the hopes it has raised, it will, yes, have to engage seriously both with these questions and with that tradition. Were he to do so, we could all benefit and learn from the debate, whether or not all disagreements were resolved.

Coming to terms with capitalism

Isaac, however, would preclude such discussion. Here we return to his fundamental reason for dismissing all criticism made from a Marxist perspective. It is, for him, just a matter of fact that ‘there exists no credible, wholesale alternative to capitalism.’ However feeble Giddens’s arguments may be, ‘coming to terms with capitalism’ as Giddens has done is ‘simply the mature and serious thing to do’. The assumption of maturity is, of course, a long-standing feature of conservative rhetoric (my favourite example would be Conrad’s remark that ‘women, children and revolutionaries have no taste for irony’); but Isaac doesn’t confine himself to telling people like me to grow up and learn to live with capitalist society. He goes on to compare capitalism to water purification,

³ See, for example, Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, Oxford 1992.

modern medicine, electronic communication, industrial technology, civil liberties and representative government, 'all things that it is not credible to imagine transcending'. It is almost too easy to point out that this list confuses scientific and technological innovations and social and political institutions, between which Marx's critique of commodity fetishism sought precisely to force us to distinguish. The category mistake this melange of technologies and social relations involves is obvious: while medicine, electronics and sewage systems might all be continually improved without changing their nature, even Isaac would concede that this is not true of capitalism.

Isaac can rely on such slack reasoning because he believes world history has solved the argument for him, and come out definitively on capitalism's side. Isaac is certainly expressing the spirit of the age here. The experience of Stalinist collapse and social-democratic failure has led to the almost universal belief that capitalism cannot be transcended. In the West at least, competing political standpoints all tend to appeal to some version of liberal ideology—if not the neo-liberalism of the 1980s and 1990s, then to its communitarian or egalitarian variants, represented respectively by civic republicanism or by the theories of justice of Dworkin and Rawls. To that extent, Fukuyama's proposition that liberal capitalism has seen off any systemic ideological rivals becomes true: to paraphrase Sartre, liberalism forms the horizon of intellectual and political debate today.

Isaac positively welcomes this condition as the attainment of 'maturity', the triumph of 'democratic pragmatism'. But it is the very belief that there is no alternative to capitalism that is the main source of social despair in the contemporary world. It binds those aspiring to some real remedy for suffering and injustice to Third Way administrations that continue the neo-liberal policies currently responsible for this misery in the first place. (Nor is this merely a First World experience: it is also the story of the African National Congress since it took office in 1994, and of the presidencies of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brazil and Kim Dae-jung in South Korea.) The sense that 'There is no alternative' helps to motivate all kinds of destructive—often self-destructive—behaviour, to which Blair and Clinton's only response is to build more prisons.

But has world history really thrown in its hand? Already, by the turn of the century, a perceptible shift in the political mood of a substantial

minority in the advanced capitalist countries has begun to occur. The experience of triumphant neo-liberalism in power has produced a growing array of movements and currents of opinion which demand a more humane and democratic alternative to the dominant economic model. The demonstrations at the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle, vividly evoked in NLR 238 by Jeffrey St Clair, have been the most significant development so far, taking place at the height of a US boom widely held to represent American capitalism's freedom from past constraints, in the very city symbolizing its new dynamism. This was a front that united organized labour with environmental movements and anti-poverty campaigns, against the WTO's attempt to institutionalize a neo-liberal agenda favourable to the multinationals.

There were, of course, important differences of opinion, and perhaps of interest, among the forces that came together in Seattle: there is also little clarity or agreement about the nature of the desired alternative to neo-liberalism, and considerable ambiguity over whether to seek the reform or abolition of the WTO itself (implicit in such arguments is, of course, the larger question of whether the alternative should be a better version of capitalism, or a society of an altogether different kind).⁴ None of this is surprising, given the extent to which the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' has laid waste thinking of this sort. Partly in consequence of the resulting vacuum, many of the most effective contemporary anti-capitalist voices—in Britain, for example, George Monbiot—come from a Green rather than a socialist background.⁵

France

Nevertheless, the important point is that movements are beginning to emerge that express the *desire* for alternatives—to the neo-liberal model, but also to some degree to capitalism *tout court*. It seems highly probable that this desire will stimulate the development of more systematic critical thinking about both capitalism and other ways of organizing modern societies. Indeed, it is arguable that precisely this kind of process is already under way in France. The great public-sector strikes in

⁴ See, for example, S. George, 'Comment le OMC fut mise en échec', *Le Monde diplomatique*, January 2000.

⁵ For example, 'Land, Genes and Justice: An Interview with George Monbiot', *Imprints*, 3.2, 1998–9.

the winter of 1995, and the wave of struggles that followed them, have created a socio-political climate that not only propelled the 'plural left' under Lionel Jospin into office in the 1997 legislative elections, but has also given radical anti-capitalist thinking a serious audience for the first time since the *nouveaux philosophes* sought to extirpate French Marxism in the mid-1970s.⁶

Bourdieu's new public role is one dimension of this changed situation, but there are others—for example, the readership and organized support that *Le Monde diplomatique* has acquired in the past few years, and the emergence of new activist coalitions such as ATTAC, campaigning for the imposition of the so-called Tobin tax on international financial speculation. Champions of the previously hegemonic neo-liberal *pensée unique* are beginning to sound the alarm about the emergence of a new 'far left in philosophy', represented not merely by Bourdieu but by Daniel Bensaid, Etienne Balibar and Alain Badiou.⁷ This intellectual and political climate, underpinned by a workers' movement whose confidence has revived markedly since 1995, represents an important constraint on Jospin, compelling him to use a socialist rhetoric pointedly different from the language of the 'third way', and to persist in election promises—notably, the 35-hour week—that risk embroiling him in conflict with an increasingly aggressive employers' federation.⁸

Anti-capitalist opposition

One cannot, of course, put more political weight than they can carry on either the Seattle protests or the developments in France. But they show that neo-liberalism is beginning to generate its opposite, in the shape of an anti-capitalist mood among disaffected minorities in Western soci-

⁶ On the new period in French politics ushered in by the 1995 strikes, see J. Wolfreys, 'Class Struggles in France', *International Socialism*, 2.84, 1999.

⁷ P. Raynaud, 'Les Nouvelles radicalités de l'extrême gauche en philosophie', *Débat*, May–August 1999, pp. 90–116; see also, from a very different perspective, D. Bensaid, 'L'Engence de critique', *Rouge*, 29 July 1999.

⁸ See, for example, Jospin's speech to the Congress of the Socialist International, 8 November 1999, in which he invokes Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes* (whose French translation was blocked till very recently thanks to the prevailing hostility to Marxism), insists on what is still 'useful' in the Marxist method, and argues: 'We must continue to think capitalism, in order to contest it, master it, and reform it.' <http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/PM/DO81199.htm>

eties, which is starting to find intellectual expression, particularly in the country where the revival of resistance has so far been strongest. It does not follow, of course, that this mood will automatically expand to embrace a majority in an effective movement for social transformation, or that its theoretical articulation will necessarily be powerful or persuasive (given the diversity of currents involved, it certainly won't be uniform). But the fact remains that the liberal ideological hegemony is beginning to break up, barely a decade after Fukuyama announced its epochal dominance.

It would be amazing were this not to happen, sooner or later. Even Isaac acknowledges that the capitalism he would have us embrace is 'a system of systematic and global inequality'. He further concedes that 'certain Marxian categories of analysis' continue to offer insights into 'features of capital accumulation'. How far, one wonders, does this concession go? Does Isaac recognize that capitalism involves not simply social injustice, but an inherent tendency towards crises? Or does he dismiss belief in such a tendency as one symptom of the 'religious, indeed almost Kierkegaardian critique of capitalism' that he attributes to me? In the former case, it is incumbent on him to address the questions I posed to Giddens and Bourdieu: what would a serious programme of reforms designed both to reduce inequality and to control capitalist instability look like? On what social agencies could it rely and how would they overcome the resistance from 'the forces of inequality and indignity' that have broken previous reformist projects? But if Isaac disdains such questions, and joins the complacent consensus (currently encouraged by the Internet stock-market bubble) that affirms that capitalism has finally overcome the business cycle, it is hard to see in what sense he can claim to be expressing views that come from the Left, however generously defined. Bourdieu's position seems to me both ethically and intellectually immensely superior, motivated as it is by the desire to alleviate the suffering that is all too evident in what Isaac chooses to call 'this awful, wonderful and tragic world'.

The structural injustices and economic instabilities inherent in capitalism are such that they are bound to produce large-scale movements of opposition. Even if we concede that, as Isaac declares, there is no 'credible idea of what might replace it', it does not follow that this will remain the case. To assume the contrary is, in effect, to assert that the models actually constructed by Stalinism and social democracy in power exhaust

the whole range of socialist thinking over the past two centuries, and all the feasible alternatives to capitalism. But this is absurd—as if a social system that has existed for what is, from the perspective of *la longue durée*,⁹ a mere moment in human history, had already used up all the possibilities available to the future.

We are only at a very early stage in the disintegration of the liberal hegemony, and we cannot predict the practical or theoretical forms that left alternatives to it may take, let alone what success they might have. The vicissitudes of world history in the twentieth century brought surprises enough: who can doubt that this one will bring more? This sense of being at the start of a new and as yet unfathomable historical period makes open-minded and constructive debate essential on these questions.

⁹ For such a perspective, see Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World*, London 1999.

THE IDEOLOGY OF PLAY

JOHN ROBERTS has said much of relevance in his acute assessment of *Dogme 95*.¹ Still, he is not quite free of one error to which all reviewers of Von Trier's films seem to have been prone. He has by and large accepted Von Trier's claim that he is innocent of theory, and *Dogme 95*'s ideology of 'no-ideology'. Simple things first. If we consider *Festen* (*The Party*) and *Mifune* to be *Dogme 95* films—as Roberts and others do—then the *Dogme 95* Manifesto is not just technical, formal and unpolitical in character (as Roberts rightly notes), it must also be regarded as non-binding, for between them *Mifune* and *Festen* break almost every one of its rules—with the single exception of the unstated rule to shun any political statement. Actually, while competently made, *Festen* and *Mifune* are mainstream cinematic fare for the once-softly-radical-now-comfortably-bourgeois-and-postcommunist citizens of our high capitalist times. Reduced to its thematic core, what is *Festen* but a complex soap opera; and what is *Mifune* but the thinking man's *Pretty Woman*?

Let us take a more serious effort, Von Trier's *Idioterne* (*The Idiots*), which shows a group of young commune-dwellers simulating mental disability by 'spassing out'—acting spastic—in various public places, and attracting twitchily PC responses from those around them. Roberts reads the film as a 'critique of identity politics itself'. But if we consider the reception of the film in Denmark, we get a rather different picture. At two different screenings—one in Danish alone, and one with English subtitles—the same responses recurred; and were also implicit or explicit in many of the reviews.

First, there was laughter—of different kinds. Dominant, at least to my ears, was what I would dub the 'covert laughter' of people finding they

could again laugh publicly at things that they had been trained not to find funny: the symptoms of mental and physical disability and their social effects. If Von Trier had made a comedy about someone who was handicapped, he would not have found as receptive a public as those that watched the slapstick farces of our black-and-white past. Most of us have learnt to feel that such mockery is distasteful and wrong, just as we have learnt (over the ages) not to consume other human beings, challenge opponents to duels, and so on. But if you present 'normal' people *playing* mental and physical disabilities, you provide an excuse for indulging in some cultured, covertly cruel laughter. Watching some of these people watch *The Idiots*, I was struck by the thought that the title of Von Trier's film might allude not to the actors but to members of the audience. For such a gambit is not new to Von Trier's art, as we shall see.

This particular sort of laughter was not always unconscious, though it was never addressed by reviewers. Instead, what reviewers and filmgoers discussed was the way in which *The Idiots* satirizes 'political correctness', connecting it to Denmark's supposedly 'communal ethos'. In fact, Roberts's remark that 'Von Trier himself grew up in a commune' attributes greater visibility and coherence to Danish communes than is justified by facts. These are not Israeli Kibbutzim. It might even be argued that Danish communes have been less vehicles of community and social democracy than of bourgeois hegemony in a small, homogeneous nation which could easily transform its 'native' proletariat into a kind of quasi-bourgeoisie. Certainly, it is striking how harshly the only substantial 'replacement proletariat' in Denmark today—coloured immigrants—are actually treated by the state and by communes alike. Whatever its international noises about human rights, Denmark has some of the most draconian laws in Europe dealing with immigrants and refugees. Thus the tendency to see—and celebrate—*The Idiots* as an attack on 'political correctness' evokes another kind of complicit laughter. It is easier to mock this correctness in an exaggerated, enacted situation than to do so openly in real life. But one should realize what such elbowing and nudging implies. Assaults on 'political correctness' in the United States have all too often been attacks on anyone who finds racist, sexist or homophobic language offensive. Reactions in Denmark have been even more retrograde. Here 'political correctness' has been dismissed as an American fad, without the slightest sense of any poten-

¹ John Roberts, 'Dogme 95', NLR 238, November–December 1999.

tial for linguistic contention in the Danish language. Inuit are still called 'Eskimo' at leading academic conferences, and a court has reportedly ruled that the Danish equivalent of 'nigger' (pronounced similarly) can be used in public discourse as it does not have any negative connotations. No educated Dane would bat an eyelid at descriptions of members of a women's handball team as girls, though male teams naturally consist of men.

Beyond aporia

The Idiots offers, however, a clue to a deeper strand in Von Trier's cinema. In the series/film that made his name, the first four episodes of *Riget* (*The Kingdom*), one can see a device developing that he has since put to work in a range of different settings—the now widespread postmodern ploy of aporia, or 'unresolved doubt'. The mysterious happenings and voices in the hospital of *The Kingdom* have both material and spiritual 'explanations', objective or subjective origins, between which the film leaves interpretation calculatedly suspended. This is the same manoeuvre we find in the drowning-that-is-a-miracle towards the end of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, in Raju's sensation of rain in R. K. Narayan's *Guide*, in the narrative of Kieslowski's *Double Vie de Veronique* and *Three Colours: Red*, and incidents in a host of other books and films. Between mystical and mundane readings, the issue is deliberately left unresolved.

With *Breaking the Waves*, however, Von Trier ventured *beyond* this kind of aporia. The film itself is divided into 'chapters', signalled by intertitle sequences of lush, picture-postcard shots and soft, romantic music, while the drama depicts, against the bleak moral and physical backdrop of a small Calvinist village on the northeast coast of Scotland, the story of a woman who sacrifices herself body and soul for her man. When her husband, a Dane paralysed by an explosion on an oil-rig, begs her to take someone else as a lover, so he can have at least a vicarious erotic life, the heroine nobly complies with a series of affairs, weeping as she goes. As in *The Kingdom*, the tale hovers in a fashionably ambiguous atmosphere, and could have been left there. But Von Trier does not leave it there. The husband recovers, the heroine dies and, at a desolate funeral, the local church damns her for her sins. The husband, however, steals her body back for a free and humane burial at sea. At the end of this ceremony, he is roused by his friend: something strange is taking place. There is

no land or ship within radar distance and yet they can hear the tolling of church bells.

Hearing being a partly subjective sensation and radar not foolproof, *Breaking the Waves* could have ended there—and we would have been left with a familiar aporia. But no: the camera pulls back, high into the sky, beyond the clouds, to show huge bells hanging from ‘heaven’ and tolling for all they are worth. One might think: who would not burst out laughing at this denouement? Nothing could be more mistaken. Audiences—down to the last macho man—react with deep and euphoric emotion, handkerchiefs much in evidence. Now, if you distrust the kind of life that the heroine of *Breaking the Waves* aspires to—a life of sacrifice to her husband—you could connect the heavenly bells to the schmalz of the film’s section-breaks, and take the ending as a radical slap in the face of those who accept the values of the story line. If you do *not* do so, you would appear to be willy-nilly committing yourself to the ideology of a Christian heaven and a male-centred universe. The fact, of course, is that most people who found the film’s ending deeply touching and not at all satirical do not consider themselves either believers or male chauvinists. Yet if they react partly (vestigially?) from such reflexes, Von Trier’s art allows them to avoid facing the glare of these ideologies in the open. In its own way, this is a response that resembles the laughter and remarks which greeted *The Idiots*.

What is going on here? A contemporary success from another part of Europe throws some light on the nature of the double-take. Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful* attracted much praise, but is nevertheless a deeply questionable film. An Italian Jewish father, Guido, attempts to protect his child from and against the realities of a Nazi concentration camp. To do so, he convinces the child that all the actors in the camp—guards and inmates—are playing a game: by following a few rules they can accumulate a thousand points which will get the winner a tank as first prize. The rules change constantly, but they involve a great deal of hide-and-seek, make-believe and ‘silence’, as Guido contrives to persuade the boy to stay out of sight. Anyone who complains about not having enough food is disqualified and has to go home.

In spite of winning a number of Oscars (grounds for suspicion in themselves), *Life is Beautiful* has been criticized for taking too terrible a subject for comic treatment, even tragic comedy. But its real vice surely lies else-

where. The film uses the myth of a game in a way that could only fail to strike viewers as problematic because they are already so habituated to postmodern tropes. For so far as the child in *Life is Beautiful* understands the game, if he doesn't follow the rules he will only fail to win the tank. But the 'game' that was played out in the concentration camps was far more serious—failure there meant death, even if all the 'rules' were followed. That game could not be narrated by way of the tricks devised by Guido: a real concentration camp never allowed the kind of space and invisibility that is needed for the game to succeed in the film (it is extraordinary how much time Guido spends sneaking round corners, unobserved). The brutality of a concentration camp would infiltrate the dormitory through the breakdown of all previous—'normal'—rules: violent guards, exhausted and terrified prisoners, a prevailing sense of agony and death. Above all, in order to survive in the concentration camp the boy would have to know that it was *not* a game—that what was at stake was not a first prize, but survival and human dignity. Actually, in inventing the game, Guido not only associates little Giosue more closely with the guards (they are playing the same game), he also distances the boy from the other prisoners. The other children in the camp (who do not seem to know about the game), and a man who reveals to the inmates that they will all be killed, have to be dismissed as competitive liars by Guido—thus denying his son the very possibility of collective resistance.

Games

The idea of narrating the world as play is by no means, of course, peculiar to our postmodern and post-structuralist age. It was a common theme of Elizabethan drama. Franco Moretti has noted that Shakespeare's 'problem' plays—*Measure for Measure*, for example—often end with the revelation that all the vicissitudes, trials and conflicts on display have been choreographed by the sovereign from the start. By this device, the world is once again made into a theatre—and so 'the performance can end, declaring the theatre as such henceforward gratuitous'. A finale that 'sends its repercussions backwards'—suddenly revealing that the Duke or Prince has been in control all along, and the dead were just playing possum—is an ending that negates the play's 'character as an irreversible temporal sequence, as *history*.' What we are seeing is a dramatization of 'the ideal of every restoration culture: to abolish the irreversibility of history and render the past everlasting.' Here, the 'real' (as enacted on

stage) is revealed to have been play all along—and play, at that, directed by an omnipotent sovereign. In keeping with a feudal world-view, all play their parts on the stage of the world, allotted to them by the social hierarchy. It is in this sense that play is made irreversibly 'real' in baroque drama.

The case of *Life is Beautiful* is related, but distinct. In the film, it is the 'real' that becomes reversible—made into play. The plot is full of episodes where Guido manages to 'replay' a lost/false move, and thus prevent discovery. At a more complex thematic level, we are faced with the narration of an undoubtedly 'real' tragedy—the judeocide—by way of a potentially reversible 'play'. While no one can go back and *play* the judeocide again, one can always technically go back and replay all games. It is for this reason that Guido's death—he is marched off by a guard, clowning to the end, just as the camp is about to be liberated; we hear the final gunshot off-screen—is necessary; it underlines the fact that this drama is irreversible, and saves the film from succumbing completely to its postmodern posture. But that posture still shapes *Life is Beautiful*: for it is not the material, but the symbolic world that is central to Benigni's film. Consciousness is all. Much like the Fredy Neptune of Les Murray's poem, who can perform superhuman feats simply because he is not conscious of feeling pain, Guido's child can survive the harshness of concentration camp life because he perceives it not as reality but only as a game.

The world as play

The idea of life as play has another limit, illustrated too by Shakespeare—think of the preoccupation of *Othello* with appearances and types. As Moretti remarks: 'The world he can no longer reduce to a theatre opens on to a mode of conduct that both completes and negates the theatre: the lie. For if the individual exists socially because he plays a part, then what matters most is his performance . . . Not the least of Shakespeare's merits is to have coolly illuminated the extent to which the ideal of the world-as-theatre had become vulnerable once a space of freedom and individual interest had opened up, creating a gap between "person" and "function".' Today we are much further removed than Shakespeare from a feudal-hierarchical world in which a 'person' was his or her 'function'. There is surely more space for freedom and individual interest in today's high-capitalist world than there was in early 17th century England. Yet

unlike *Othello*, *Life is Beautiful* works not to undermine the 'world-as-theatre' but to sustain it.

With this we return to Von Trier's recent films and their viewers. Both *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots* draw their mainstream credibility from their appeal to the status of play. In *Breaking the Waves*, this appeal is deeply hidden. But it is obvious that the spectator who has just been sniffing into his or her hanky would never enact the values of its heroine, nor expect bells to ring in heaven. S/he is, however, willing to accept them for the sake of a certain aesthetic and moral emotion—this 'painful celebration of life and love', as one critic put it. In *The Idiots*, Von Trier turns the game inside out. The invisible framework of *Breaking the Waves* becomes the visible structure of *The Idiots*. This is a film *about* play—the idiom of 'mimicry' and 'performativity' that Roberts employs tells only half the story—that reveals how deeply ideological and internalized the postmodern version of it has become. If aporia used to leave bourgeois doubts comfortably unresolved, Von Trier's move 'beyond' it lets bourgeois certainties persist, without so much as a need to confront or defend them.

REVIEWS

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274 pp, 1 86064 417 1

TARIQ ALI

BETWEEN HAMMER AND ANVIL

Coveted in the late 19th century by Russian Tsar and British Viceroy alike, Afghanistan's impassable fastnesses enabled it to avoid occupation by either colonial power. Two British invasions were repelled—a warning to both London and St Petersburg. Eventually an expanding Tsarist Empire and the British Empire in India accepted Afghanistan, still a pre-feudal confederacy of tribes with its own king, as a buffer state. The British, as the more powerful force, would keep a watchful eye on Kabul. This arrangement suited all three parties at the time. The result was that Afghan society never underwent even a partial imperial modernization, remaining more or less stationary for over a century. When change finally came, the catalysts were external. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the overthrow of the Ottoman Caliphate by Kemal's new model army in 1919 stirred modernizing ambitions in the young Afghan King Amanullah. Chafing under British tutelage, and surrounded by radical intellectuals who looked to Enlightenment ideals from Europe and the bold example from Petrograd, Amanullah briefly united a small educated elite with the bulk of the tribes, and won a famous military victory against British arms in 1919.

Success in the field gave Amanullah the confidence to launch a Reform Programme, partially inspired by Kemal's revolution in Turkey. A new Afghan Constitution was proclaimed, promising universal adult franchise. If imple-

mented, it would have made Afghanistan one of the first countries in the world to give all women the right to vote. Simultaneously, emissaries were dispatched to Moscow to seek assistance. Though the Bolshevik leaders were themselves beleaguered by multiple armed interventions from the Entente powers, they treated the Afghan overtures quite seriously. Sultan-Galiev received the messengers from Kabul warmly on behalf of the Comintern, while Trotsky sent a secret letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party from his armoured train at the front-line of the civil war. In this remarkable dispatch, he wrote: 'There is no doubt at all that our Red Army constitutes an incomparably more powerful force in the Asian terrain of world politics than in the European terrain. Here there opens up before us an undoubted possibility not merely of a lengthy wait to see how events develop in Europe, but of conducting activity in the Asian field. The road to India may prove at the given moment to be more readily passable and shorter for us than the road to Soviet Hungary. The sort of army which at the moment can be of no great significance in the European scales can upset the unstable balance of Asian relationships of colonial dependence, give a direct push to an uprising on the part of the oppressed masses and assure the triumph of such a rising in Asia . . . The road to Paris and London lies via the towns of Afghanistan, the Punjab and Bengal.' A hallucinatory document by one of Trotsky's military specialists proposed the creation of an anti-imperialist cavalry corps of 30-40,000 riders to liberate British India.

Nothing came of such schemes. No doubt the failure of Tukhachevsky's march into Poland two years later had a sobering effect in Moscow. Amanullah got no more than friendship and advice from the Bolsheviks. The British, understandably nervous, were now determined to overthrow him. New Delhi purchased the services of a couple of leading tribes, fomented religious opposition to the king, and finally toppled him with a military coup in 1929. The Comintern journal *Inprecorr* commented that Amanullah had only survived for a decade because of 'Soviet friendship'; more pertinently, the senior Bolshevik Raskolnikov remarked that Amanullah had introduced 'bourgeois reforms without a bourgeoisie', whose cost had fallen on peasants whom he had failed to win over with an agrarian reform, allowing Britain to exploit social and tribal divisions in the country.

Fifty years later history repeated itself, with a grimmer outcome. In the early seventies the reigning King Zahir was ousted by his cousin Daud, who declared a republic with the support of the local Communists and financial aid from the USSR. When, in April 1979, the Shah of Iran convinced Daud to turn against the Communist factions in his army and administration, they staged a self-defensive coup. Bitterly divided amongst themselves—inner-party disputes were sometimes settled with revolvers—the Afghan Communists had no social base outside Kabul and a few other cities. Their power rested on control of the Army and Air Force alone. The United States, taking over the historic role of Britain,

soon started to undermine the regime by arming the religious opposition to it, using the Pakistani Army as a conduit. Under mounting pressure, the Afghan Communists broke into violent internecine strife. At this juncture, Brezhnev took the plunge that had been beyond the Bolsheviks—dispatching a massive military column to Kabul to salvage the regime.

This was exactly what Carter's National Security chief Zbigniew Brzezinski had been hoping for. The Russian leaders fell headlong into the trap. The entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan transformed an unpleasant civil war funded by Washington into a jihad enabling the mujaheddin ('holy warriors') to appear as the only defenders of Afghan sovereignty against the foreign army of occupation. Brzezinski was soon posing for photographs in a Pathan turban on the Khyber Pass and shouting 'Allah is on your side', while Afghan fundamentalists were being feted as freedom-fighters in the White House and Downing Street.

Washington's role in the Afghan war has never been a secret, but John Cooley's remarkable book is the first systematic and detailed account of how the United States utilized the intelligence services of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to create, train, finance and arm an international network of Islamic militants to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. As a former Middle-East correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and ABC Television, Cooley gained easy access to retired and serving officials in the states mobilized in this final episode of the Second Cold War. Although he does not always cite his sources, and some of what he says should be viewed with scepticism, his information corroborates much that was widely bruited in Pakistan during the eighties. According to his account, the US drew in other powers to the anti-Soviet jihad. Cooley contends that Chinese help was not restricted to the provision of weapons, but extended to the provision of listening-posts in Xinjiang, and even dispatch of Uighur volunteers whose costs were covered by the CIA. Some form of Chinese assistance was privately always acknowledged by the Generals in Islamabad, though Beijing has never admitted it. Cooley even suggests the PRC has not been immune to the post-Soviet-withdrawal-syndrome: Islamic militants turning on the powers that armed them. However, the country not mentioned by Cooley is Israel, whose role in Afghanistan remains one of the best kept secrets of the war. In 1985 a young Pakistani journalist working for *The Muslim*, Mansur, accidentally stumbled across a group of Israeli 'advisers' at the bar of the Intercontinental Hotel in Peshawar. Aware that the news would be explosive for the Zia dictatorship, he informed his editor, some friends and a visiting WTN correspondent. A few days later the mujaheddin, alerted by the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), captured and killed him.

In the course of his account, Cooley describes a meeting in 1978 in Beirut with Raymond Close, former station chief of the CIA in Saudi Arabia, who clearly charmed him. If he had questioned him more closely, he would have discovered that Close had previously been posted to Pakistan, where his father had been

a missionary teacher at the Forman Christian College in Lahore. His son was fluent in Persian, Urdu and Arabic. In nominal retirement, he would have been ideally placed to help orchestrate operations in Afghanistan, and their back-up in Pakistan, where the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) functioned as a channel for CIA funding of clandestine activities, and laundering profits from the heroin trade. Cooley's argument that the United States and its relays in the region paid a heavy price for victory in Afghanistan is indisputable. In Egypt Sadat was executed by Islamist soldiers as he was taking the salute at a military parade. In Pakistan Zia—not to speak of his fellow-passengers Arnold Raphael, US Ambassador in Islamabad, and General Rahman, of Pakistan's ISI—died in a mysterious plane crash that few believe was an accident. The five thousand US marines still in Riyadh are not there to threaten Saddam Hussein, but to defend the Saudi Royal Family.

Afghanistan itself, a decade after Soviet withdrawal, is still awash with factional violence. Veterans of the war have helped to destabilize Egypt, Algeria, the Philippines, Sudan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Daghestan and Saudi Arabia. They have bombed targets in the United States and declared their own war against the Great Satan. Osama bin Laden, whose icon adorns the jacket of Cooley's book, has become the bugbear of US official and popular fantasies—after starting his career as a Saudi building tycoon with links to the CIA. When the Pakistani Generals pleaded with the Saudi dynasty to send a princeling from the Royal Family to lead the holy war, he was sent as a friend of the palace instead. Doing better than expected, he was to surprise his patrons in Riyadh and Foggy Bottom. Cooley concludes with the following advice to the US government: 'When you decide to go to war against your main enemy, take a good, long look at the people behind you whom you chose as your friends, allies or mercenary fighters. Look well to see whether these allies already have unsheathed their knives—and are pointing them at your own back.' His pleas are unlikely to move Zbigniew Brzezinski, who has no regrets. 'What was more important in the world view of history?' he asks with more than a touch of irritation, 'the Taliban or the fall of the Soviet Empire? A few stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?' Contempt for the rights and lives of ordinary people elsewhere in the world—a trade-mark of the Washington outlook before, during and after the Cold War—could not be more pithily expressed.

Ahmed Rashid's book is the first credible account of the rise to power of the Taliban. The author is a courageous Pakistani journalist who has been reporting from Afghanistan since 1978, and refused to be intimidated or suborned in his pursuit of truths inconvenient to the powers that be. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the *de facto* alliance of states that had backed different factions of the mujaheddin soon fell apart. Islamabad did not want any broad government of reconstruction, preferring—with US and Saudi support—to impose its own pawn, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, on the country. The result was a series of

vicious civil wars, punctuated by unstable cease-fires, as Hazaras (backed by Iran), Ahmed Shah Masud (backed by France), and the Uzbek general Dostum (backed by Russia) resisted. When it became obvious that Hekmatyar's forces were incapable of defeating these foes, the Pakistan Army shifted its backing to the students it had been training in religious schools in the North-West Frontier since 1980, where the alphabet consisted of *jeem* for jihad, *kaaf* for kalashnikov and *tay* for tope (cannon). By 1992 the Chief Minister of the North-West Frontier Province could remark that the juvenile fanatics in the madrassahs might or might not 'liberate' Afghanistan, but they would certainly destabilize what was left of Pakistan.

The Taliban were orphans of the war against the Russian infidel. Trained and dispatched across the border by the ISI, they were to be hurled into battle against Muslims they were told were not true Muslims. Rashid captures their outlook vividly: 'These boys were a world apart from the Mujaheddin whom I had got to know during the 1980s—men who could recount their tribal and clan lineages, remembered their abandoned farms and valleys with nostalgia and recounted legends and stories from Afghan history. These boys were from a generation who had never seen their country at peace. They had no memories of their tribes, their elders, their neighbours nor the complex ethnic mix of peoples that was their homeland. They admired war because it was the only occupation they could possibly adapt to. Their simple belief in a messianic, puritan Islam was the only prop they could hold onto and which gave their lives some meaning.' This deracinated fanaticism—a kind of bleak Islamic cosmopolitanism—made the Taliban a more effective fighting force than any of their localized adversaries. Although Pushtun in origin, the Taliban leaders could be sure their young soldiers would not succumb to the divisive lure of ethnic or tribal loyalties, of which even the Afghan left had found it difficult to rid itself. When they began their sweep from the frontier, a war-weary population often greeted them with an element of relief: citizens in the larger towns had lost faith in all the other forces that had been battling at the expense of civilian life since the Soviet departure.

If the Taliban had simply offered peace and bread, they might have won lasting popular support. Soon, however, the character of the regime they were bent on imposing became clear to the bewildered population. Women were banned from working, collecting their children from school and, in some cities, even from shopping: effectively, they were confined to their homes. Girls' schools were closed down. The Taliban had been taught in their madrassahs to steer clear of the temptation of women—male brotherhood was a condition of tight military discipline. Puritanism extended to repression of sexual expression of any kind; although this was a region where homosexual practices had been common for centuries, recruits guilty of the 'crime' were executed by the Taliban commanders. Outside their ranks, dissent of any sort was brutally crushed with a reign of terror unmatched by any preceding regime. The Taliban creed is a

variant of the Deobandi Islam professed by a sectarian strain in Pakistan—more extreme even than Wahabbism, since not even the Saudi rulers have deprived half their population of all civic rights in the name of the Koran. The severity of the Afghan mullahs has been denounced by Sunni clerics at al-Azhar in Cairo and Shiite theologians in Qom as a disgrace to the Prophet. The great Pakistani poet Faiz, whose ancestors came from Afghanistan, could have written his lines from prison about the land of his forebears:

Bury me underneath your pavements, oh my country
Where no person now dare walk with head held high,
Where true lovers bringing you their homage
Walk furtively in fear of life and limb;
A new-style law-and-order is in use
Stones and bricks are locked up and dogs turned loose—
Villains are judges and usurpers both,
Who speaks for us?
Where shall we seek justice?

Certainly not from the Commander-in-Chief in the White House or his aide-de-camp in Downing Street. Little was heard from these pulpits for human rights as the women of Afghanistan were subjected to a vile persecution. Rashid notes tartly that a few mild words of criticism from Hillary Clinton were more designed to soothe American feminists during the Lewinsky scandal—not a very demanding task—than to alter the situation in Kabul or Kandahar or Herat, ancient towns where women had never before been reduced to such depths of misery. American business was less hypocritical. Responding to complaints about the pipeline it is constructing from Central Asia through Afghanistan to Pakistan, a spokesman for the US oil giant Unocal explained why capitalism is gender-blind: 'We disagree with some US feminist groups on how Unocal should respond to this issue . . . We are guests in countries who have sovereign rights and their own political, social, religious beliefs. Walking away from Afghanistan would not solve the problem.' Nor, of course, improve the rate of return on its projected investments.

Rashid makes clear that the Taliban could not have swept across Afghanistan without the military and financial backing of Islamabad, sustained in turn by Washington. The top Taliban commander Mullah Omar, today the one-eyed ruler of Kabul (and bin Laden's father-in-law), was long on the direct payroll of the Pakistani regime. The conquest of power, however, has had an intoxicating impact on the Afghan zealots. The Taliban have their own goal for the region—a Federation of Islamic Republics that would enforce a *pax Talibana* from Samarkand to Karachi. They now control sufficient revenues from the heroin trade to fund their land campaigns. But they want access to the sea and have made no secret of their belief that Pakistan with its nuclear arms will fall

to them one day. They know they enjoy strong support at the lowest and highest levels of the Pakistan Army. Lt. Gen. Mohammed Aziz, Chief of the General Staff, and Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Ahmed, the Director of the ISI, the two senior commanders who currently flank Pakistan's more secular-minded military dictator, Pervaiz Musharraf, are well-known for their Taliban sympathies. The sad and squalid story of the wreckage of Afghanistan is told well by Cooley and Rashid, but the tragedy is far from over.

Geremie Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*
 Columbia University Press: New York 1999, \$30 (hardback)
 512 pp, 0 23110 614 9

HENRY ZHAO

TO GO POP, OR NOT— THAT IS BEYOND QUESTION

In the Red, the largest book to date on contemporary Chinese culture, offers a formidable range of information, with very few errors, mostly of translation or romanization. Barmé, an Australian reporter and researcher with long experience of watching the PRC from Hong Kong, has looked closely at his subject, and his attempt to understand its reconfiguration deserves our admiration and respect. He sensibly takes the crushing of the revolt in Tiananmen in 1989 as a watershed that has marked a decisive turn in Chinese cultural life. The book starts with a discussion of the political purge that followed Tiananmen, and returns to current political developments in its last chapter and long Postscript. Its somewhat delphic title can at a guess be taken two ways—certainly as a reference to the context of cultural production under the greatest remaining Communist regime; but perhaps also to its upshot. Barmé stresses at the outset the sheer volume of print now pouring off the presses in China—at least according to UNESCO statistics, the PRC was one of only two states to publish more than 100,000 titles in 1994, though given the size of its population this is not that impressive a figure. He dubs this ‘publishing furore and writing fever’ a new ‘graphomania’ and ‘logorrhoea’. But what of its quality? The title could be read as hinting at an ultimate superfluity of all this sound and fury—a deficit in meaning that no amount of hyperactive output can hide.

Barmé’s focus, as this initial emphasis suggests, is highly selective. For all its larger claims, *In the Red* is essentially devoted to the fate of Chinese literature and ‘literary politics’, rather than culture in general. Readers expecting cover-

age of cinema, music, or architecture, for example, will be disappointed. Apart from one, rather outsize chapter on t-shirts—whose legends lend themselves to his treatment—he confines himself to literary topics, with only side-glances at other fields of culture. In this respect *In The Red* is narrower than Jean Zha's lively, shorter study *China Pop*, which deals with television, town planning and films as well as novels. There is, however, one sense in which a concentration on literature may offer a privileged angle of vision on recent Chinese culture. Most observers agree that modern Chinese culture can be roughly divided into three sectors: that of the dictatorial state, that of the intelligentsia, and that of mass consumption. This triangle is older and more visible in literature, where from the early 20th century onwards constant shifts of power forced them into a complicated set of alliances and oppositions, than in any other field.

It might appear that Barmé does not subscribe to this tripartite division, since he repeatedly argues that any distinction between high and low art is merely 'academic', and that 'mutual cannibalisation' undermines even the distinction between party propaganda and opposition to the regime in matters of culture. Were this really the case, contemporary Chinese culture could more or less be treated as a single undifferentiated bloc. In practice, however, Barmé does not really contest the triangular division, since he devotes separate parts of the book to the three sides, and offers very different evaluations of each. He precedes his discussion of them, however, with a theoretical sketch taken from an essay by the Hungarian writer Miklós Haraszti, who in the eighties described the cultural scene in his country as a 'velvet prison', trapping intellectuals into unwary collusion with the regime, from which there was no escape. The contradiction between this scheme and the tripartite lay-out of the book is evident, since it is clear that the highly commercialized scene on display in China today is a prison-house neither for popular nor for official culture. It looks more like an unprecedented carnival for both.

Barmé begins by depicting State controls over current Chinese cultural production. His portrait of the official grip on the mental life of the nation is not entirely unflattering. He tells us many stories of the remarkable adaptability of the PRC propaganda machine to commercial styles of presentation, however clumsy or grotesque the result might at first seem to be. In a chapter with the cute title 'CCP™ & Adcult PRC' he suggests that the Chinese Communist Party has been impressively successful in turning agitprop into advertising, as a less intrusive and more effective means of domesticating the Chinese masses. 'Party adcult', he writes, 'de-sensitizes the public' to the power wielded over it. A certain ambivalence of tone is detectable in his account of this updating of ideological manipulation. The reason why Barmé should be less than scathing about it becomes clear when he turns to popular culture.

This is where his main interest lies. About two-thirds of the text are devoted to the stunning growth of Chinese popular culture. Barmé dwells with relish on

the power of the new commercial tide of distraction and entertainment. Official propaganda has had to adopt its stratagems and its vocabulary. Intellectuals fall into aphasia before the ingenuity of its forms. Barmé reserves his most enthusiastic treatment for market-oriented popular fiction, whose supreme practitioner is the *Wunderkind* Wang Shuo, and foremost champion the former Minister of Culture Wang Meng. Each enjoys a special chapter of detailed discussion and hundreds of mentions throughout the book. There is, however, a difference in his portrait of the two. Wang Meng's self-assumed role as enlightened advocate of popular culture left him open to objection from other critics, and Barmé shows us how he was embarrassingly attacked by—well, some young intellectuals. Wang Shuo, on the other hand, emerges unambiguously as the central hero of 'contemporary Chinese culture'.

In point of fact, there is no doubt that Wang Shuo could have become an excellent writer—had he not been spoilt by market hype (which he came to manipulate without scruple) and foreign acclaim of the kind we find here. His early works were biting satires with real moral force; *Playing with Thrills* remains one of the best Chinese novels of the past fifteen years. Gradually, however, Wang Shuo started to strike the pose of a complacent school bully, flaunting his brutishness with the proud declaration, via one of his stock characters: 'I'm a hooligan (*liumang*). I'm not scared of anyone'. Barmé renders *liumang* with the euphemistic 'lout', lending the term a jovially populist note it does not have in Chinese, where its meaning is closer to the sociological notion of lumpen, with a strong undertow not just of bad manners, but of criminal violence. It is no surprise that Wang Shuo should have reaped such rewards from this stance in today's China, where uncontrolled corruption and rampant abuse of power for monetary gain have been spreading like a prairie fire. Wang Shuo's glorification of the *liumang* simply feeds—and is fed by—this demoralized culture at large.

Barmé himself notes that 'at times it was difficult to distinguish between Wang's fictional creation and his circle of writer-business partners'. The wider issue, of course, is whether—as his admirers would have it—the effect of Wang Shuo's work is to debunk the hypocrisies of official culture, or to reinforce them. More generally, has the growth of commercial popular culture in the PRC strengthened or weakened the regime's dictatorial control of cultural life? To this crucial question, Barmé returns no consistent answer. On more than one occasion, suggesting that the state has actually benefited from the new commodification of culture, as 'its sign system has been enriched and enhanced', he seems to sense that popular—like any other—culture in China needs some criticism. Yet after pages of excited coverage, he offers virtually none.

When Barmé moves to the third and final part of his topic, intellectual culture, his tone changes. Here he has hardly a kind word to say. Even if we are forewarned by talk of the 'velvet prison' at the outset of the book, what follows is disconcerting. A primary *leitmotif* is that all cultural circles in China, without

exception, have been infected by greed for money. Virtually everyone who figures in his pages is held to have a hidden commercial motive. Barmé revels in such attributions. Thus the series of books fiercely hostile to commercialization, launched in the nineties by Xiao Shailin, is 'a canny commercial strategy'. The young essayist Yu Jie who has won wide support among students for his uncompromising cultural critique is producing 'the right stuff hawked for the wrong reason'—his success is due to 'packaging and marketing'. Intellectuals who take their distance from global marketization are making 'an annual pilgrimage to the enemy camp.' Avant-garde artists are 'now working for the Party on contract'. Counter-cultural film directors Zhang Yuan, Wu Wenguang and others display 'unswerving entrepreneurship'. Any writer who discusses national or international questions seriously is a 'memorialist'. This—Barmé sweepingly declares—'is a way to package a best-seller'.

The purpose of these characterizations is to show us that the explosive marketization of art and culture in China has stripped intellectuals of any moral superiority over hacks. In fact, Barmé tries to tell us, the opposite is true. By comparison with Wang Shuo, who never minces words in his pursuit of wealth and fame, writers who try to offer readers food for thought are little better than whitened sepulchres. In Wang Shuo's celebrated dictum, there are only two types of writer in China today, 'relatively deep and meaningful louts' and 'laissez-faire louts' like himself. In these conditions, frank money-chasers are of course more loveable and even more moral than phonies. In much the same spirit, Barmé can scarcely conceal his contempt for the Chinese intellectuals whom he finally gets around to discussing in the last chapters of his book. Describing the TV mini-series *A Beijing Man in New York*, he tells us that the scene in which the hero empties himself into a blonde prostitute and showers her with dollar bills was 'particularly popular' with 'members of the Chinese intelligentsia'. On this gratuitous note, he embarks on a brief tour of the latter. Here he reserves his greatest disdain for those intellectuals who in 1993–94 debated the question 'why China has lost its humanist spirit', which in his eyes merely proved that 'even the basic questions that the Chinese asked about their predicament had to be imported from outside', let alone the answers. In retrospect, the discussion only served to 'mark the collapse of the broad consensus among writers on major intellectual topics'.

Since *In the Red* is essentially a survey of literary culture, it is all the more striking that at this juncture Barmé screens out all but completely the 'serious' novels of the nineties. He fails even to mention such central works as Han Shaogong's reworking of Chinese grass-roots culture in *Glossary of Maqiao*, Chen Zhongshi's lament for the disintegration of the countryside in the civil wars in *Plateau of the White Deer*, Gao Xingjian's paean to the forgotten riches of a Chinese subculture in *Soul Mountain*, Li Rui's interwoven narrative of modern China in *Silver Town*, or Wang Anyi's moving tale of the downward spiral of a

Shanghai woman in *Song of Eternal Regret*—to cite only a few leading novels of this period. The single exception, to which he devotes a few pages, is Jia Pingwa's salacious exposure of urban decadence *The Abandoned Capital*: typically treated as suspect of 'a commercial ploy'. A better account of this work—a text of considerable significance, which deserves careful discussion—can actually be found in *China Pop*.

Most inexcusable of all is the complete disappearance of the novelist and essayist Wang Xiaobo, whose name is casually cited once and then discarded in a footnote. His brilliant wit, exercised on ironies of power and sex, far outshone the ruses of Wang Shuo. His tricky fiction—for the most part set in the dysfunctional landscape of the Cultural Revolution or a dystopian future China—is more entertaining. His dextrous language, with its overtones of quasi-classical rhetoric, is a pleasure of a different order from Wang Shuo's street argot. One of the few genuine free-lancers of his time, in his short life (he died of a heart attack in 1997) Wang Xiaobo waged such a splendid battle against the obscurantism of both state and market that he earned himself a permanent niche in any history of Chinese culture at the end of the last century.

With omissions like these in mind, we can see what weight to attach to Barmé's opening claim that Chinese intellectuals are 'more compliant' than were their East European counterparts, as the Chinese are generally satisfied with 'slipping a controversial line, sentiment, or point of view into an otherwise prolix and flabby work'. Verdicts like these would suggest that his book, harping on the astuteness of popular culture and the aptitude of party ideologues, is designed to shame Chinese intellectuals lost in the velvet prison of a communist state, with neither the courage to fight the regime nor the wit to go resolutely commercial. But what, it may be asked, should these hapless individuals do to live up to the standard Barmé sets them? If we follow the book, there is little hope for them. Barmé is right to notice that neither commercializers nor intellectuals have been 'willing to confront the authorities directly'. Once again, however, the reluctance of the former is candid and intelligent, since their aim is avowedly only to entertain and make money, but shameful of the latter, since they affirm noble ideals in word while 'helping the state farms of art' in deed.

Elsewhere, however, Barmé empathizes with the tactic of the editor of the journal *Orient*, that there is not much point in turning the magazine 'into a kamikaze vehicle for open dissident views which would result in immediate closure', so the only way forward is to 'negotiate a space for themselves within the ambit of reformist culture'. In other words, within the velvet prison—where else could such a negotiation occur? Barmé ends by handing Chinese intellectuals the same prescription he sarcastically dismisses at the beginning. In fact, both the question—what to do about the velvet prison?—and answer—negotiate a space within it—are 'imported', as Barmé would say. Their function is to furnish him with a specious whipping-boy, taken from Eastern Europe of yes-

teryear rather than China today. His critique is in bad faith. *In the Red* drives home the message that the major trend of Chinese cultural life in the nineties has been anti-intellectualism. But Barmé's account is a participant survey, rejoicing—despite occasional protestations to the contrary—in this great shift. The underlying theme of his book is that we must, for better or worse, understand and accept commercialization, and join it since we can't beat it. The future of Chinese culture lies in all three parties going pop together, and wallowing joyfully in a common mire. Meanwhile Chinese intellectuals should be unmasked, to tear away any foolhardy refusal to submit to the 'historical trend'. But we may ask: could not Barmé himself be suffering from a more serious aphasia than his targets, as one stunned by the powerful onrush of commodity culture and the flexible controls of the dictatorial State? Whose words are more 'in the red'—those of Chinese intellectuals, or his own?

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Paul Virilio, *La bombe informatique*
 Gallée: Paris 1998, 130 Fr (paperback)
 160 pp, 2 7186 0507 3

JOHN ARMITAGE

THE THEORIST OF SPEED

Paul Virilio, once an architect of the Brutalist school, and phenomenologist in the tradition of Husserl, is best known today for the idea that 'dromology'—the logic of speed—stands at the centre of the political and techno-cultural transformation of the contemporary world. Born in 1932, the son of a Breton mother and an Italian communist father, Virilio was torn from his family at the onset of the *Blitzkrieg* and grew up as a highly sensitive evacuee child in Nantes, under Nazi occupation. In his late teens he converted to Christianity under the influence of Abbé Pierre's worker-priests. Educated at L'École des Métiers d'Art in Paris, he worked with Matisse as a craftsman in stained glass, before becoming an intellectual provocateur as co-editor of the experimental journal *Architecture Principe*. In the mid-sixties he studied the architecture of war intensively and built the 'bunker church' of Sainte-Bernadette du Banlay at Nevers. An irrevocable split occurred with his partner in *Architecture Principe*, the architect Claude Parent, when Virilio became politically active during the May revolt of 1968. A year later he was given a chair at the École Spéciale d'Architecture at the behest of its students, which he occupied until his retirement in 1997. The publication of *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* in 1986 established him as a creative theorist of modern life.

Dromology explores the experience of human subjects caught up in technocultural vectors of ever-increasing speed. The background to the idea is deeply personal, rooted in Virilio's traumatic childhood during the Second World War. But its aim is universal: to understand the historical conditions of individual existence under the tyranny of an unrelenting acceleration of every coordinate—economic, social, political and cultural. *La bombe informatique* opens with a

quotation from Werner Heisenberg: 'No one can say what will be "real" for people when the wars which are now beginning come to an end.' In his own field, Heisenberg showed that any simultaneous calculation of the location and speed of a particle, no matter how accurate, was subject to an element of uncertainty from the interference of the calculation itself, throwing the principles of causality at atomic and subatomic levels into disarray. By analogy, Virilio would pursue the uncertain relationships between speed as the 'reality' of a universe of war, and our perception of its causalities.

The question that dominates his new book is posed in its first sentence—'civilianization or militarization of science?' Since the Second World War, he argues, two kinds of bomb have come to overshadow ordinary life. The first is the atom bomb, 'capable of using the energy of radioactivity to smash matter'. The second lies in the title of the book, an explosive weapon 'capable of using the interactivity of information to shatter peace'. Virilio, of course, is referring in the first instance to the emergence of the Internet. But the information bomb is a wider notion, encompassing the transformation of work processes by the spread of mobile phones and 'zero-hour' contracts, the saturation of the art world by advertising pressures and motifs, the dissolution of barriers of privacy by data-banks and of morality by industrial pornography, the construction of the universal genome, not to speak of the escalation of the military into stratospheres of celestial surveillance. The fall-out of this bomb is mediated misery around the world, as electronic screens displace linguistic exchanges, and human conflicts shudder into a quickened tempo in the era of 'chrono-politics'.

The psychic consequences of this turn are not mere concomitants of technological development—problems of adjustment to progress itself. They are 'communications disturbances', created by the 'brutal incursions' of a violent pattern of advance that 'acts like a forensic scientist on us'. For Virilio, this is a particular kind of progress which 'accumulates and condenses in each of us the full range of—visual, social, psycho-motor, affective, sexual—disorders that it leaves as the successive detritus of its innovations, each with its full complement of specific injuries.' Not least among these is the waning of any critical distance towards technology itself, as 'we have slid unconsciously from pure technology to techno-culture, and finally to the dogmatism of a totalitarian techno-cult'. In these conditions, distinctions between the world of art, the world of advertising and the world of pornography effectively break down—Virilio takes the Royal Academy show *Sensation* of 1997 as a case in point. In the 'terminal arts' that stage a 'confrontation between a tortured body and an automatic camera', can be seen the coming of an 'endo-colonization' that could potentially reduce every member of a humanity that has 'had its day' to the status of a specimen. We are not there yet. But in a bleak landscape where neo-liberalism squares off against cyber-feminism, and high commands prepare a 'grey ecology' of polluted distances, we are not so far away either. As Virilio remarks, in 'dromocratic'

capitalism, when the biotech corporation calls, 'you come running'. Today, the information bomb requires a new kind of deterrence, if nations are to avoid the fission of their 'social cores' in the shock-zone of the new chrono-politics.

La bombe informatique, like all of Virilio's work, proceeds by exaggeration, analogy, ellipse. To some extent, it is a victim of the logic of speed itself. Its tone is often manic, and its evidence capricious. Chasing a multitude of discontinuities and shape-shifting 'lines of flight' simultaneously, its method could be said to reflect Virilio's creed of a self-confessed 'anarcho-Christianity'. This is a religious outlook Virilio shares to some extent with the late Jacques Ellul, author of *The Technological Society* (1964). It separates him clearly from 'transpolitical' postmodernists such as Baudrillard (with whom he has been mistakenly associated), 'poststructuralist anarchists' like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (to whom he was once close), or the deconstructionist and 'spectral Marxist' Jacques Derrida. He has been more practically engaged than these. Far from resting in the academic confines of the École Spéciale d'Architecture, Virilio has always sought to communicate his ideas to as wide an audience as possible—earning, in fact, a 'National Award for Criticism' in 1987. His attacks on neo-liberalism, however abstractly or catastrophically formulated, have touched a nerve in France, where periodicals like *Le Monde diplomatique* regularly seek his—unfailingy forthright—views on everything from Fukuyama to the end of geography and the future of techno-culture. By comparison with a figure like Foucault, Virilio is the personification of a 'committed intellectual'.

The image of the 'information bomb' offers a lurid premonition of the future—the dramatic tenor of Virilio's work is far removed from the complacent drift of writers like Nicholas Negroponte, contemplating the bliss of *Being Digital* (1995). But though his description of the world appears deeply pessimistic, Virilio's politics are not defeatist. He has always argued that resistance is possible, and personally sought to practice it. For all his idiosyncrasies, Virilio's ideas have exerted an influence well beyond his own philosophical starting-point. For example, *The Art of the Motor*, a work he published in 1995, is an important reference in the recent writing of imaginative Marxists as different as Slavoj Žižek in *The Plague of Fantasies* (1997) and André Gorz in *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (1999). His latest book is no less likely to become a source for other creative radicals, looking for a provisional path out of the quicksands of postmodernism, but also a way to the sympathies of ordinary citizens. Firing off political and techno-cultural neologisms at the speed of light, Virilio's passionately argued texts do not always hit their intended targets. But for anyone seeking a critique of the cultural logic of late militarism that ranges from the Internet to endo-colonization, Virilio's 'hyper-modern' theory of the information bomb is what they have been waiting for.

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Noel Parker, *Revolutions and History*
 Polity Press: Cambridge 1999, £14.99 (paperback)
 232 pp, 0 7456 1135 4

Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*
 Macmillan: Basingstoke 1999, £15.99 (paperback)
 424 pp, 0 333 65328 9

GORAN THERBORN

RECONSIDERING REVOLUTIONS

Between our contemporary concepts of revolution and modernity there is an intimate mutual dependence. She who does not understand revolution does not understand modernity, and he who does not understand modernity does not understand revolution. Both notions denote a rupture with the past, an affirmation of the innovative capacity of the present, and a vision of the future as an open horizon, on which new lands will be discovered and new houses built, never seen before. The history of modernity is a history of revolutions: scientific, industrial, post-industrial, info-tech; sexual, artistic and, last but not least, political—American, French, Russian and Anti-Colonial. It is no surprise there should be a close, if by no means invariable, connexion between scientific or aesthetic avant-gardes and revolutionary politics, from the socialism of Einstein to the communism of Picasso.

Up to the 1790s, the term 're-volution' normally signified a movement backwards, or a continuous rotation, in a circular or cyclical direction. The entry in the *Encyclopédie*, the collective summa of the French Enlightenment, refers to astronomy, watch-making, and cog-wheels. It does also mention a political usage in the 'modern history of England', viz. the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. But upheavals that we consider revolutions today, like the English or American, were in pre-modern times typically conceived as rebellions to restore 'ancient rights and liberties'—or 'the knowne lawes and statutes and freedome of the Realm', as the 1689 Declaration of Rights put it—violated by a tyrant. More loosely, the word could by the mid-18th century, as in Voltaire, refer to changes in a general

sense. What the term definitely did not denote was a break with a traditional political system, opening the gate to a novel future. Thomas Paine's words in early 1791 marked a turning-point: 'It is an age of Revolutions, in which everything may be looked for'.

From the 19th century onwards, revolutions—as extraordinary events, the object of intense passions, vast mobilizations and dramatic social conflicts—have always been popular topics for research and debate. In the 1960s and 1970s, the apparent actuality of revolution multiplied the number of such studies and widened their analytic and geographical range. Two influential new approaches were Theda Skocpol's focus on the role of the state—its crisis and post-revolutionary re-strengthening—in social revolutions, and Jack Goldstone's model of demographic pressures on the fiscal and the institutional base of Eurasian agrarian polities. Subsequently the bi-centenary of the French Revolution and the implosion of the Soviet Union triggered new rounds of literature, much of it politically correct denunciation of the objects to hand.

The result is today an enormous corpus of scholarship on revolution(s), at once creating space for introductory text-books, and raising the stakes for original reflections. Noel Parker's *Revolutions and History* falls somewhere between these stools. Attractively written, well read and circumspect in judgement, it offers an essay rather than a systematic guide to the literature on revolution. Parker's framework is a combination of modernization theory and world system analysis, approaches that sit together here without much mediation. His general argument is that 'revolutions occur where states are conduits of the pressures from the expanding, modern global system'—the English revolution being a 'borderline case', at the late end of the 'pre-revolutions' of the Reformation era, before popular overthrows of government proper. But his main interest lies in the meanings that revolutions have held for contemporaries and posterity. His key concept here is what he calls 'the revolutionary narrative', or the 'form within which the events and actions that constitute one revolution or another are interpreted and acted upon'. Even as actual revolutions occurred at ever greater distances from the core of the modern world, revolutionary narratives relayed the impact of these outliers within it.

This is potentially a very fruitful idea. But the genre Parker has chosen does not allow him to elaborate it. Taking 'willed change towards a better future' as the central motif of modern revolutions, he overlooks the fact that modernity has generated at least three master narratives—emancipation/liberation, progress/development, and victorious survival (in a darwinist sense). Parker pays no attention to emancipation, arguably the most important revolutionary narrative, or to evolutionary stories of progress, that allow collective efforts for a better future to be conceived as reform rather than revolution. In effect, his subject is ill-fitted to the interpretive essay, a Latin (American-cum-European) speciality often characterized by a reckless drive to originality, rush to judgement, and preoccupation

with style. Even a more balanced Anglophone variant is not best suited to tackle a subject where so much detailed scholarship has accumulated.

Fred Halliday's *Revolution and World Politics* focuses on the complex set of relations between revolutions and the inter-state system, over the short and long run—relations of causation, conditioning, constraint, amplification, support, or confinement. This is a major original work, by a scholar with extensive first-hand experience as a sympathetic observer of Third World revolutions. Social and political revolutions have normally been studied as processes bounded by state borders—that is, as local chains of events with local outcomes. Halliday turns the lens around, and starts from the explicitly internationalist orientation of revolutionary leaders and ideologues. For instance, from Robespierre: 'Men of all countries are brothers' and the various nations must assist each other 'like citizens of the same State'. Halliday, emphasizing that they meant what they said, traces the record of revolutionary internationalism all the way up to Iranian support of the Lebanese Hizbollah and the Cuban apparatus for outfitting guerrillas across Latin America run by the late Manuel Pinheiro. The thrust of his book is a forceful correction of what he calls a 'double exclusion' in the prevailing approaches to revolution, 'exclusion of the international from the analysis of society, and of ideology from the study of revolution'.

Revolution and World Politics is divided into three parts. The first starts with an overview of concepts of revolution, and then moves to questions of revolutionary internationalism and export of revolution. Halliday is a good guide to this terrain, which he knows well. It ends with a perceptive chapter on six antinomies of revolutionary foreign policy. The second part focuses on the systemic repercussions of revolutions—how they affect inter-state relations, and are affected by them. This is the core of the book, written with verve and clarity, if not always with even success. A somewhat impressionistic chapter highlights international factors in the causation of revolutions; another asserts, without much argument, that 'the whole history of modern international relations is one of wars and revolution'. We get wide and sharp-eyed insights into the 'incoherence of counter-revolution' and of the varieties of interaction between war and revolution. A chapter on economic constraints and failed attempts at autarky or 'delinking' poses crucial questions, and answers them rather abruptly. Finally, the third part of the book discusses theories of international relations and interpretations of the century that has just ended. Here Halliday sketches a framework for analyzing international relations in general and revolutions in particular.

Even serious scholarship on controversial issues tends to take on the flavour of its time. Revolutions have always been issues of intense contention. Currently they have fallen into widespread discredit. Can anything of current conventional wisdom be found clinging to *Revolution and World Politics*? Halliday is well aware of the problem. Indeed, he opens his account with the ringing credo: 'There are few things less becoming to the study of human affairs than the complacency of

a triumphal age'. Stressing 'the unpeaceful origin of a peaceful world', he warns against self-satisfied visions of a future of global democratic peace. Violence may always resume and 'the agenda of the revolutions of modern history is still very much with us because the aims they asserted, above all in regard to the rights of individuals and social groups, are far from having been achieved'. This commendable stance notwithstanding, in practice Halliday has had some difficulty in disentangling himself from surrounding assumptions. About a year after the book was finished, amidst the debris of the war in the Balkans and clashes in Kashmir, with battles still raging in Congo and Chechnya, and recurrent lethal racist violence in the North Atlantic zone itself, one wonders whether Halliday himself would still incline to call this a peaceful world.

This difficulty aside, he has also sometimes been too prone to accept without critical scrutiny some widespread anti-revolutionary assumptions. Today respectable opinion holds that socialist revolutions were unviable. Halliday echoes this view, alleging that they were inherently 'incapable of sustainable development'. While there can be no irrefutable proof that this conclusion is false, any scholar with a critical sense would do well to pause before endorsing the outlook of victorious politicians and ideologues at their moment of triumph. Halliday, while acknowledging that debate will continue, buys it without further ado. He is no doubt right to argue that autarky was a dead-end, and it is, of course, true that European Communism ultimately failed. But his uncritical treatment neglects the fact that until about 1970 communist Eastern Europe was closing the gap with capitalist Western Europe in economic output, life expectancy, and women's rights—in the last respect, even overtaking West-Central and Southwestern Europe.

Likewise, Halliday's dismissal of the possibility of any kind of market socialism, as 'a half-way house' that 'for internal and external reasons could not have worked' is very cursory, lacking much logical or empirical basis. He cites the internal difficulties of Sandinista Nicaragua, but does not consider the more developed and elaborate experience of Hungary in the 1980s, which foundered not on the rocks of socio-economic contradictions but on the fatal lack of national legitimacy of the regime. Soviet perestroika failed miserably, but the reasons for its downfall have yet to be fully unravelled. Economic reform in China, on the other hand, has been a spectacular success. How to define the current system in the PRC is open to debate, and where it is leading is anyone's guess. But 'a half-way house' certainly seems as good a description as Halliday's 'managed variant of capitalism'.

In tune with the times, Halliday avers that revolution turned its eyes away from Western Europe after 1848, as it moved from the developed to the under-developed world. 'There were to be no more revolutionary upheavals in Western Europe [after 1848] and after 1917 no more in Eastern Europe either.' This blots out, *inter alia*, the Paris Commune, the revolutionary breakdown of Wilhelmine

Germany and of Habsburg Austria, the Italian factory occupations of 1920, the revolutionary upsurges in Spain of the 1930s, the near breakdown of the Belgian state after the Second World War, the civil war in Greece, the Czecho-Slovak overturn of 1948 and the Portuguese revolution of 1974. France was clearly close to a collapse of the political order in late May 1968, when De Gaulle had to make sure of the loyalty of his parachute divisions. From today's perspective, with the bulk of a corrupt political class swept away, even the wild hopes and fears of 1969-70 in Italy do not look so irrational.

Another, more difficult question is posed by the history of European fascism. Halliday avoids some thorny issues here. He includes the Islamic revolution in Iran in his survey, mainly on the grounds that—whatever its retrograde ideology—it was in many ways functionally equivalent to rival secular revolutions in the Third World, in its populism and anti-imperialism. But we are not shown why a similar argument could not be applied to Italian fascism. Halliday does touch on Nazism, which he terms a 'counter-revolution' that fought 'against any idea of progress or historical development'. This can be questioned. Nazi ideology and practice was by no means uniformly hostile to science—it drew much of its appeal from an affinity with Social Darwinism. Was Nazism just a counter-revolution? Only 'in part', Halliday concedes, without taking more notice. In fact, there was a significant difference—as well as alliance—between fascism and the purely counter-revolutionary right in Europe, which any comparison of inter-war Italy and Germany with Hungary, Romania, Portugal or Spain points up. In the former, traditionalist counter-revolutionaries were defeated by their Fascist allies; in the latter, victory went the other way.

Fascism is irreducible to counter-revolution, and modernity is not synonymous with Habermas's version of the Enlightenment. Fascism can be viewed as a modern project to rival the liberal and socialist projects, but even if we categorize it otherwise, it occupies a position in the history of European modernity that is more complicated, and more disturbing of modernist self-images, than Halliday allows for. This is not just a problem of definitions within European history. It has two wider implications for Halliday's conception of revolution and modernity. It fatally weakens the idea that 1848 marked an end to revolutionary upheavals in Western Europe. For how could there be counter-revolutions if there were no revolutions, at least around the corner? Omission of fascism also means lack of any analysis of the ways in which nationalist, anti-internationalist state ruptures have affected and have been affected by international relations. There was an export of fascism too.

Such critical observations do not mean that Halliday is seriously unfaithful to his excellent methodological principles. The main line of the book is one of critical sympathy with its currently unfashionable object. We would do well to remember the three 'not easily forgotten lessons of history' with which it ends. First, 'the enduring inability of those with power and wealth to comprehend the

depth of hostility to them'; second, 'the ability of history, and of social movements in general, to surprise'; finally, 'the need of people—individually and in mass collective movements—to dream, to believe in alternatives to the world in which they live'. This is Halliday at his strongest. Commenting on critiques of the 'myth' of revolution by Furet, Laqueur and others, he notes that this is an account that 'fails the test of explanation, of identifying *against what* revolutionaries and their sympathisers were reacting. Equally it fails to explain why millions fought and in many cases died for these beliefs.' Conversely, Halliday's book is impressive not just as a work of analytic scholarship, but because it is written *from within revolutions*, with an ear for their polyphonous voices of aspiration and hope—from Milton to Khomeini—and with a feeling for their constraints and contradictions as their militants—from Jacobins to Fidelistas—manoeuvre in a hostile world, without being in the least apologetic or uncritical. He goes back and forth between different centuries and different continents with the sureness of someone familiar with all the rooms of the vast, and rather ruined, house of revolutions.

Still, there is nothing final here. Is modernity really made only of war and revolution, as Halliday suggests? War is an age-old phenomenon, and even revolution, if we extend the notion as Halliday does to the time of Cromwell, still governed by the ancient word of sacred scriptures, would precede modernity. Missing, above all, is the variable setting of revolutions within different routes to modernity across the globe. The cases Halliday takes are used as illustrations or supports of an argument, without any systematic analysis of their trajectories or outcomes, or comparison of these with cases where there was no revolution. In principle the book argues for a combination of state-centred, socio-economic and cultural analysis, but in practice there is no real exploration of the ways in which the tripartite system of inter-acting states, economic systems, and cultures, has been structured or how it should be periodized. Capitalism is invoked, but not integrated into the framework of *Revolution and World Politics*. In this sense, the whole book—focusing as it does overwhelmingly on ideas and inter-state policies—is marked by a socio-economic under-determination. Perhaps most tellingly, we are told of the importance of social movements, but we would look in vain for any overview of them. With all due admiration for the achievement of this volume, we must hope for another and more systematic one to come.

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Guy Oakes and Arthur Vidich, *Collaboration, Reputation and Ethics in American Academic Life: Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills*

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RUSSELL JACOBY

FALSE INDIGNATION

In 1940 a brash Texan student, C. Wright Mills, enrolled in the PhD programme in sociology at the University of Wisconsin where he met a German refugee professor. They could not have been more different. 'I have never known anyone who fit my stereotype of the Texan better than Mills,' recalled Gerth's widow. He was 'a big, burly man who gave the impression that the world belonged to him . . . Everything he did was on a large scale'. He married four times; built houses during his summers; roared about on a motorcycle. Gerth, on the other hand, was a scholar's scholar, who never mastered American ways and byways. If Mills gave the impression he owned the world, Gerth seemed to be, and perhaps was, a perpetual visitor. Certainly he did not find a place in the US. He was not Jewish, and since he left Germany relatively late (in 1938), even the refugee community initially distrusted him. When he presented himself to the emigrés at the New School, Gerth later recalled, 'they turned around and left. As far as they were concerned, I was a Nazi.' Though he overcame this hostility, he remained on the margins of even the marginalized. Unlike George Mosse, who also taught at Madison, he never became a well-known expatriate authority. When he returned to Germany in 1971, after an unsatisfactory American career, he was greeted without enthusiasm. 'I came back to Frankfurt, but they didn't want me. I had not, after all, become famous.'

Yet Gerth was famous in small circles. A compulsive reader with a photographic memory, he both dazzled and bewildered students. When I was at Madison in the sixties, Gerth was still teaching there, tolerated but hardly prospering. Most students avoided this brilliant but troubled mind, but a few of us followed him around. It was from Gerth that we glimpsed something of pure

Geist; he thought with an intensity and range that could sometimes take our breath away. To be sure, he paid a price. He ignored not only pedestrian intellectual markers and categories, but class schedules and professional commitments. We would frequently have to remind him that his class had ended an hour earlier, and to chaperone him to his next obligation. Today he would surely be jobless.

To his credit Mills divined Gerth's genius. After a virtuoso lecture by Gerth, moving at such intellectual speed that most students could take no notes, Mills decided that Gerth was 'the only man worth listening to in this department.' On his side, Gerth saw in Mills not only intellectual voracity and ambition, but no doubt too a *savoir faire* he lacked himself. The two men began to work together, and the improbable partnership of all-American go-getter and unworldly German scholar produced two books—a collection of Weber's writings and a textbook on social psychology. To secure his precarious position in Madison, Gerth—who always found it difficult to put his thoughts on paper—was desperate for publications, increasingly the only coin of the American academic realm. Mills by contrast was a publishing dynamo, who was to write his way out of the Midwest to Columbia with a stream of articles and books, including two that became sociological best-sellers: *White Collar* and *The Power Elite*. Moving sharply to the left in his last years, he became a leading critic of American capitalism at home and abroad, greeting the early New Left with enthusiasm, and lambasting US policy towards the Cuban Revolution. His final book was a celebration of *The Marxists*. For a brief historical moment, Mills seemed to be everywhere in America: on television, the newspapers and best-seller lists. Yet he too paid a price. Living like a meteorite, he burnt out like one, dying after a series of heart attacks at the age of forty-six, in 1962.

Gerth, who survived Mills by sixteen years, never got over him. Nor have some other sociologists. For many staid professionals Mills always seemed too big, too political, too productive and too famous. If he does not loom large in the public mind today, he continues to disturb the sleep of the discipline. Mutterings against his memory are not new. A few critics have long grumbled that Mills exploited Gerth, since he knew little German and could therefore not have genuinely co-edited translations from Weber, while *Character and Social Structure* must have been written essentially by Gerth. These are the charges that Oakes and Vidich have now inflated into a small book. They present it as 'a modest contribution to the history of academic ethics in our time' that does not 'take sides, settle scores, or reach conclusions concerning who was right', but treats the relations between Gerth and Mills as a case study in 'academic career management' triangulated by 'three parameters: cognitive standards, practical norms, and strategic controls'. The sociological jargon is a thin mask for the animus against Mills that drives the book. Towards the end Oakes and Vidich drop the preten-

tious argot and depict Mills as simply a manipulative hustler, a 'big shot' steeped in intrigue and deception.

What is their evidence? Drawing on letters between Gerth and Mills to reconstruct the contractual negotiations that led to the publication of *Character and Social Structure*, Oakes and Vidich believe that they have unearthed a shocking tale of villainy. The story that scandalizes them goes like this. In 1941 Gerth and Mills proposed to write a textbook on social psychology. Mills obtained a contract for it from D. C. Heath, with a nil advance. Eight years later, no progress had been made on the manuscript, and Mills had second thoughts about the contract. By now he had published another book and *White Collar* was in the press, so he wondered whether he could not strike a better deal. Reckoning that he and Gerth would have to take unpaid leave of absence from teaching to complete the book, he secured an offer from Harcourt Brace of an advance of \$3,000, to be shared between them. Nowadays, of course, authors in this situation would have unilaterally cancelled the first contract. But the editor of the series who had originally signed the book was Howard Becker, a senior colleague of Gerth at Madison, and in those gentlemanly times they instead spent months requesting a 'release' from it, plying Heath with letters claiming they could not or would not do the book, and wanted out. Oakes and Vidich express astonished horror. Our authors 'had no right to a release', since this is a 'publisher's prerogative'. Imagine! Mills and Gerth were trying to extricate themselves from an eight-year-old contract in which not a single cent or manuscript page had changed hands. Oakes and Vidich summarize their transgressions in a tone worthy of Zola: 'Gerth and Mills deceived James Reid at Harcourt Brace, leading him to believe he had purchased sole rights . . . They also deceived John Walder and Heath, who held a contract . . . Gerth deceived Becker . . . Mills deceived Walder concerning the lack of progress on *Character and Social Structure* . . . More generally Gerth and Mills deceived everyone' (sic). The upshot? Gerth and Mills eventually got the release, cashed their advance from Harcourt and finished the book. So much for this sordid tale of corruption and deceit.

Oakes and Vidich then spend further pages circling around a second question—the extent to which Mills wrote up *Character and Social Structure* from Gerth's lecture notes (and therefore did not deserve to be credited as co-author). It never occurs to them to say anything about the contents of the book itself, which they simply refer to as a 'classic'. Actually, of course, as a glance at it shows, *Character and Social Structure* is no way a major or innovative work: it is a fairly uninteresting textbook of social psychology. How exactly it was composed hardly matters, in any wider intellectual sense.

From *Max Weber*, on the other hand, has always been a strong collection with a powerful introduction, a volume indispensable to generations of students. Here too Oakes and Vidich are determined to find malfeasance. But in this case the tensions between Gerth and Mills are no mystery. Mills originally proposed

the project and found a publisher for it. Gerth was the primary selector and translator of texts from the German, and Mills polished them into more fluent English, while the two men worked together on the introduction, finalized by Mills. From the outset Gerth, whose knowledge of the originals was the condition of the enterprise, wanted to be clearly identified as the senior partner in it, repeatedly clashing with Mills over the wording of the contributions to the collection. Mills, while readily agreeing to Gerth's priority, did not want to be reduced to the rank of an assistant. He was naturally anxious for credit too. When arguments between them grew sharp, Mills regularly offered to resign from the project, letting Gerth complete the volume on his own. But though often insecure and cantankerous, Gerth never wanted this—he needed Mills, however much at times he might regret it.

Tensions often plague co-authored volumes. A fair-minded judgement must be that Mills acted in a reasonable, if not saintly, manner. He told Gerth he regarded himself as the 'junior author' of the book, and was 'grateful to have had the chance to learn what I have of Weber . . . with you'. He also tried to remind Gerth of a bitter truth: the work of translating and editing was not well-regarded; they were arguing over crumbs. 'The relative lack of recognition . . . involved, is not due to my getting any of "your share" but due to the simple fact that neither of us will get much.' However, Gerth remained testy. When a publisher's announcement listed their names in the wrong order, he exploded. Mills promptly apologized, and protested to the publisher that Gerth as senior authors must be identified first. Yet the wrangling continued. Years later, when the jacket of Mills's *Causes of World War Three* described him as 'translator and editor (with H. H. Gerth) of *From Max Weber*', Gerth fired off a series of infuriated letters to publishers and colleagues, as well as to Mills himself, protesting the insult and error. Mills's reply, that a designer unaware of academic etiquette was responsible, did not mollify him. Gerth was never really willing to share credit for the Weber volume.

Gerth had reasons for his rancour. As a dispirited refugee who never found his feet, he would have been less than human not to envy the success of his protégé. Forty years on, Oakes and Vidich have no such excuse. They wish to present Mills as a scoundrel, and try to enlist Gerth for the prosecution. But Gerth's relationship to Mills was complicated. He resented, but also needed and admired him. Oakes and Vidich make no attempt to respect this ambivalence. Typically, they claim both that Gerth essentially inspired *White Collar*—his 'contribution to its genesis and development' would be 'difficult to exaggerate'—and that his objections to it were 'numerous, substantial, and in the end devastating'. In reality Gerth praised *White Collar* warmly, saying he wished he had written it himself, and wrote an introduction to the German edition in which he described it as among 'the most important works published by an American since the Second World War'. At a memorial meeting after Mills's death, he

spoke movingly of his life. 'Mills died of a failure of heart not of nerve', as one who 'traversed the course of his life with the tempestuousness of a swift runner . . . I have lost my friend; as the Romans used to say, my alter ego.' Oakes and Vidich cannot abide this tribute, and with crude presumption tell us Gerth was just 'wrong': Mills was not his 'soul mate', as Gerth supposed, but on the contrary 'represented a type of intellectuality' alien to everything he stood for.

The most bizarre feature of *Collaboration, Reputation and Ethics* is its treatment of the last of these terms. Oakes and Vidich report that as a student Mills was shocked to discover that Becker, his dissertation advisor, had published one of his graduate papers as if it were his own—but could not seek redress, for fear of jeopardizing his future in the department. They go on to argue that as a professor, however, Mills did likewise, if not quite as egregiously. In the only detailed examination of Mills's writing in the book, they show the extent to which Mills drew on a paper written by one of his students who had worked in a department store, for a typology of salesmen in *White Collar*, without giving him adequate acknowledgment. Here they finally seem to have a case. Yet while damning Mills's conduct in this instance, they simultaneously condone the practice as itself perfectly acceptable. In an astounding passage, they maintain that—since graduate students are not 'professional equals of their professors'—'their work may be designated as approved objects of appropriation for which no restitution or reparation can be expected. Put another way, the appropriation of student work by established academicians may be regarded as an implicit right or a mode of compensation, in exchange for which the student receives a PhD and initiation into the academic community.' Talk about foxes guarding chicken coops! Billing their work as 'a modest contribution' to 'the troubling and fundamental question of the norms that should govern academic collegiality', Oakes and Vidich calmly uphold the right of professors to rob students as just recompense for teaching them. Oakes himself teaches courses on ethics.

The true reasons for their resentment of Mills become clear by the end of the book, as they confect a mythical image of him to give themselves an easy time deflating it. 'An unsparing critic of corporate capitalism at mid-century, his denunciations of big business', people believed, 'were based on a vision of higher and more humane values. In defending this vision he stood alone, aloof from the enticements of success and impervious to the temptation to sell out. Mills became the hero who died young, waging a solitary struggle against the forces of darkness armed only with the weapons of his mind.' Of course, if Mills was thought to walk on water, it is a discovery to show that he was a real individual who swam. But what does the demonstration consist of? That Mills gave lectures, sought book contracts and solicited opinions of work in progress. He even published complimentary reviews of scholars who, they allege, could later be helpful to him. (Their solitary evidence of this malpractice is a laudatory notice of Franz Neumann in *Partisan Review*, as if admiration for *Behemoth*

required a malign explanation.) They tell us Mills 'profited from his critique of big business in *White Collar*, which sold well', and wrote for magazines of the 'cultural apparatus'. Mills once had an article in *Harper's*, but otherwise published in academic journals or leftist reviews. When Hearst offered him a job as marketing advisor at five times his salary at Columbia, he merely laughed and asked why Hearst didn't give him a tractor for his New York farm instead. Such is the material out of which Oakes and Vidich produce the grotesque conclusion that Mills 'worked out an agreeable modus vivendi with corporate capitalism and its agencies of promotion'—'insofar as any coherent political position can be ascribed to Mills, it was a politics of the status quo'.

The tendentious facts and sham indignation of the book are coupled with silence about its own genesis. A reader would not know that Vidich was a pupil of Gerth's, and editor of a collection of his writings. A collaborative study of academic collaboration contains not a line about its own—what brought the two authors together or how they shared the work. Oakes and Vidich never consider the careers of Gerth or Mills against the wider background of the professionalization of American sociology at the time—Mills as a skilled insider who ended as a renegade outsider, Gerth as the exemplar of an isolated refugee. They hazard not the slightest reflection on the evolution of American sociology since Mills. Even the smaller question of the reception of Max Weber in America, which should be central to their story, is ignored. The cramped vision and pseudo-objectivity of the book are one. *Collaboration, Reputation and Ethics in American Academic Life* is less a sociological study of professional norms in mid-century America than a grudge masquerading as erudition.

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PETER WOLLEN: Government by Appearances

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MALCOLM BULL: Where is the Anti-Nietzsche?

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PREFACE

September 30, 1965

In late 1965 and early 1966, one of the greatest mass killings of the twentieth century was carried out in Indonesia, the slaughter in a few weeks of hundreds of thousands of real or alleged Communists. The massacres set the stage for Suharto's thirty-two-year dictatorship. Behind them lay events of a few days, still sinister and obscure. On September 30, 1965 a group of middle-ranking army officers, most of them originating from the Diponegoro Division centred in Semarang, and once commanded by Suharto, attempted a coup de force in Jakarta. Claiming that a Council of Generals was planning to seize power from Sukarno, President of the country since independence, they killed six top generals in Jakarta, took Sukarno to an air base outside the capital, and proclaimed a revolutionary council. In Central Java, local garrisons followed suit. Lieutenant-Colonel Untung of Sukarno's Presidential Guard was nominal leader of the movement, backed by forces from two battalions in the capital; youths from a recently formed militia containing Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) volunteers were entangled as auxiliaries.

The two Army generals who controlled major concentrations of troops in Jakarta—logically prime targets for the strike—were left untouched. The senior was Suharto. In the course of October 1, he quickly gained control of the situation, putting the leaders of the movement to flight and taking over the air base where they had installed Sukarno. The following day, the risings in Central Java were crushed. With the President now in his hands, Suharto proclaimed the Communist Party, which Sukarno had relied on as a counterweight to the Army, the author of the events of September 30. Two weeks later, a nation-wide pogrom was unleashed to exterminate it. The PKI then numbered some three million members—the largest Communist Party in the world outside Russia and China. By the end of the year, nothing was left of it. In March 1966 Sukarno, held under surveillance in the Presidential Palace, was forced to sign a decree giving Suharto executive authority. A year later, this

became the formal basis for Suharto's assumption of the Presidency, well after he had in practice become the absolute ruler of the country.

Suharto's New Order lasted until 1998, when the Asian financial crisis finally brought him down. Military terror outlived him in East Timor. But with the election of Wahid as President in 1999, survivors have begun to speak out, breaking the silence that for three decades surrounded the massacres of 1965. But the events that paved the way for the slaughter have yet to be fully explained. Did a Council of Generals ever exist? Who really planned the 'movement of September 30', and what were their intentions? Was the PKI, or a section of its leadership, party to the coup? How did Suharto manage to seize power so quickly? The first detailed attempt to consider these problems was a confidential paper by Benedict Anderson and Ruth McVey, written in January 1966, and eventually published by the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project in 1971.¹ For this analysis, Benedict Anderson was banned from Indonesia by the military dictatorship for twenty-six years. Last year, able to travel to the country again, he delivered an address in Jakarta in which he urged the need for Indonesians to face the swamp of murder and torture on which the New Order had been built, rather than merely protesting its corruption.² In the months since, as Wahid has widened the space for political expression, the start of a catharsis has moved more quickly than anyone could have expected. Among the documents to emerge on the genesis of Suharto's regime, the Defence Speech of Colonel Abdul Latief—leading survivor of the September 30th movement—at his trial in 1979, has been the most pregnant. We publish below Benedict Anderson's review of it, written in Indonesian for the Jakarta weekly *Tempo* of 10–16 April of this year.

¹ A redaction of some of its findings by Peter Wollen was released in NLR I/36, March–April 1966.

² See 'Indonesian Nationalism Today and in the Future', NLR I/235, May–June 1999.

BENEDICT ANDERSON

PETRUS DADI RATU

In the early 1930s, Bung Karno [Sukarno] was hauled before a Dutch colonial court on a variety of charges of 'subversion'. He was perfectly aware that the whole legal process was prearranged by the authorities, and he was in court merely to receive a heavy sentence. Accordingly, rather than wasting his time on defending himself against the charges, he decided to go on the attack by laying bare all aspects of the racist colonial system. Known by its title 'Indonesia Accuses!' his defence plea has since become a key historical document for the future of the Indonesian people he loved so well.

Roughly forty-five years later, Colonel Abdul Latief was brought before a special military court—after thirteen years in solitary confinement, also on a variety of charges of subversion. Since he, too, was perfectly aware that the whole process was prearranged by the authorities, he followed in Bung Karno's footsteps by turning his defence plea into a biting attack on the New Order, and especially on the cruelty, cunning and despotism of its creator. It is a great pity that this historic document has had to wait twenty-two years to become available to the Indonesian people whom he, also, loves so well.¹ But who is, and was, Abdul Latief, who in his youth was called Gus Dul? While still a young boy of fifteen, he was conscripted by the Dutch for basic military training in the face of an impending mass assault by the forces of Imperial Japan. However, the colonial authorities quickly surrendered, and Gus Dul was briefly imprisoned by the occupying Japanese.

Subsequently, he joined the Seinendan and the Peta in East Java.² After the Revolution broke out in 1945, he served continuously on the front lines, at first along the perimeter of Surabaya, and subsequently in Central Java. Towards the end he played a key role in the famous General Assault of March 1, 1949 on Jogjakarta [the revolutionary capital just cap-

tured by the Dutch]: directly under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Suharto. After the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949, Latief led combat units against various rebel forces: the groups of Andi Azis and Kahar Muzakar in South Sulawesi; the separatist Republic of the South Moluccas; the radical Islamic Battalion 426 in Central Java, the Darul Islam in West Java, and finally the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia [CIA-financed and armed rebellion of 1957–58] in West Sumatra. He was a member of the second graduating class of the Staff and Command College (Suharto was a member of the first class). Finally, during the Confrontation with Malaysia, he was assigned the important post of Commander of Brigade 1 in Jakarta, directly under the capital's Territorial Commander, General Umar Wirahadikusumah. In this capacity he played an important, but not central, role in the September 30th Movement of 1965. From this sketch it is clear that Gus Dul was and is a true-blue combat soldier, with a psychological formation typical of the nationalist freedom-fighters of the Independence Revolution, and an absolute loyalty to its Great Leader.³

His culture? The many references in his defence speech both to the Koran and to the New Testament indicate a characteristic Javanese syncretism. Standard Marxist phraseology is almost wholly absent. And his accusations? The first is that Suharto, then the Commander of the Army's Strategic Reserve [Kostrad], was fully briefed beforehand, by Latief himself, on the Council of Generals plotting Sukarno's overthrow, and on the September 30th Movement's plans for preventive action. General Umar too was informed through the hierarchies of the Jakarta Garrison and the Jakarta Military Police. This means that Suharto deliberately allowed the September 30th Movement to start its operations, and did not report on it to his superiors, General Nasution and General Yani.⁴ By the same token, Suharto was perfectly positioned to take action against the September 30th Movement, once his rivals at the top of the

³ Kolonel Abdul Latief, *Soeharto Terlibat G30S—Pledoi Kol. A. Latief [Suharto was Involved in the September 30 Movement—Defence Speech of Colonel A. Latief]* Institut Studi Arus Informasi, Jakarta 2000, 285 pp.

⁴ Respectively: paramilitary youth organization and auxiliary military apparatus set up by the Japanese.

⁵ Ironical reference to the title Sukarno gave himself in the early 1960s.

⁶ Nasution was Defence Minister and Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Yani Army Chief of Staff. Yani was killed on October 1, and Nasution just escaped with his life.

military command structure had been eliminated. Machiavelli would have applauded.

We know that Suharto gave two contradictory public accounts of his meeting with Latief late in the night of September 30th at the Army Hospital. Neither one is plausible. To the American journalist Arnold Brackman, Suharto said that Latief had come to the hospital to 'check' on him (Suharto's baby son Tommy was being treated for minor burns from scalding soup). But 'checking' on him for what? Suharto did not say. To *Der Spiegel* Suharto later confided that Latief had come to kill him, but lost his nerve because there were too many people around (as if Gus Dul only then realized that hospitals are very busy places!). The degree of Suharto's commitment to truth can be gauged from the following facts. By October 4, 1965, a team of forensic doctors had given him directly their detailed autopsies on the bodies of the murdered generals. The autopsies showed that all the victims had been gunned down by military weapons. But two days later, a campaign was initiated in the mass media, by then fully under Kostrad control, to the effect that the generals' eyes had been gouged out, and their genitals cut off, by members of Gerwani [the Communist Party's women's affiliate]. These icy lies were planned to create an anti-communist hysteria in all strata of Indonesian society.

Other facts strengthen Latief's accusation. Almost all the key military participants in the September 30th Movement were, either currently or previously, close subordinates of Suharto: Lieutenant-Colonel Untung, Colonel Latief, and Brigadier-General Supardjo in Jakarta, and Colonel Suherman, Major Usman, and their associates at the Diponegoro Division's HQ in Semarang. When Untung got married in 1963, Suharto made a special trip to a small Central Javanese village to attend the ceremony. When Suharto's son Sigit was circumcised, Latief was invited to attend, and when Latief's son's turn came, the Suharto family were honoured guests. It is quite plain that these officers, who were not born yesterday, fully believed that Suharto was with them in their endeavour to rescue Sukarno from the conspiracy of the Council of Generals. Such trust is incomprehensible unless Suharto, directly or indirectly, gave his assent to their plans. It is therefore not at all surprising that Latief's answer to my question, 'How did you feel on the evening of October 1st?'—Suharto had full control of the capital by late afternoon—was, 'I felt I had been betrayed.'

Furthermore, Latief's account explains clearly one of the many mysteries surrounding the September 30th Movement. Why were the two generals who commanded directly all the troops in Jakarta, except for the Presidential Guard—namely Kostrad Commander Suharto and Jakarta Military Territory Commander Umar—not 'taken care of' by the September 30th Movement, if its members really intended a coup to overthrow the government, as the Military Prosecutor charged? The reason is that the two men were regarded as friends. A further point is this. We now know that, months before October 1, Ali Murtopo, then Kostrad's intelligence chief, was pursuing a foreign policy kept secret from both Sukarno and Yani. Exploiting the contacts of former rebels,⁵ clandestine connexions were made with the leaderships of two then enemy countries, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as with the United States. At that time Benny Murdani⁶ was furthering these connexions from Bangkok, where he was disguised as an employee in the local Garuda [Indonesian National Airline] office. Hence it looks as if Latief is right when he states that Suharto was two-faced, or, perhaps better put, two-fisted. In one fist he held Latief–Untung–Supardjo, and in the other Murtopo–Yoga Sugama⁷–Murdani.

The second accusation reverses the charges of the Military Prosecutor that the September 30th Movement intended to overthrow the government and that the Council of Generals was a pack of lies. Latief's conclusion is that it was precisely Suharto who planned and executed the overthrow of Sukarno; and that a Council of Generals did exist—composed not of Nasution, Yani, et al., but rather of Suharto and his trusted associates, who went on to create a dictatorship based on the Army which lasted for decades thereafter. Here once again, the facts are on Latief's side. General Pranoto Reksosamudro, appointed by President/Commander-in-Chief Sukarno as acting Army Commander after Yani's murder, found his appointment rejected by Suharto, and his person soon put under detention. Aidit, Lukman and Nyoto, the three top leaders of the Indonesian Communist Party, then holding ministerial rank in Sukarno's government, were murdered out of hand. And although President Sukarno did his utmost to prevent it, Suharto and

⁵ From the 1957–58 civil war, when these people were closely tied to the CIA as well as the Special Branch in Singapore and Malaya.

⁶ The legendary Indonesian military intelligence czar of the 1970s and 1980s.

⁷ A Japanese-trained high-ranking intelligence officer.

his associates planned and carried out vast massacres in the months of October, November and December 1965. As Latief himself underlines, in March 1966 a 'silent coup' took place: military units surrounded the building where a plenary cabinet meeting was taking place, and hours later the President was forced, more or less at gunpoint, to sign the super-murky Supersemar.⁸ Suharto immediately cashiered Sukarno's cabinet and arrested fifteen ministers. Latief's simple verdict is that it was not the September 30th Movement which was guilty of grave and planned insubordination against the President, ending in his overthrow, but rather the man whom young wags have been calling Mr. TEK.⁹

Latief's third accusation is broader than the others and just as grave. He accuses the New Order authorities of extraordinary, and wholly extra-legal, cruelty. That the Accuser is today still alive, with his wits intact, and his heart full of fire, shows him to be a man of almost miraculous fortitude. During his arrest on October 11, 1965, many key nerves in his right thigh were severed by a bayonet, while his left knee was completely shattered by bullets (in fact, he put up no resistance). In the Military Hospital his entire body was put into a gypsum cast, so that he could only move his head. Yet in this condition, he was still interrogated before being thrust into a tiny, dank and filthy isolation cell where he remained for the following thirteen years. His wounds became gangrenous and emitted the foul smell of carrion. When on one occasion the cast was removed for inspection, hundreds of maggots came crawling out. At the sight, one of the jailers had to run outside to vomit. For two and a half years Latief lay there in his cast before being operated on. He was forcibly given an injection of penicillin, though he told his guards he was violently allergic to it, with the result that he fainted and almost died. Over the years he suffered from haemorrhoids, a hernia, kidney stones, and calcification of the spine. The treatment received by other prisoners, especially the many military men among them, was not very different, and their food was scarce and often rotting. It is no surprise,

⁸ Acronym for Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret, Decree of March 11, which turned over most executive functions *ad interim* to Suharto; the acronym deliberately exploits the name of Semar, magically powerful figure in Javanese shadow puppet theatre.

⁹ 'Thug Escaped from Kemusu': the Suharto regime regularly named all its supposed subversive enemies as GPK, Gerakan Pengacau Keamanan, or Order-Disturbing Elements. The wags made this Gali Pelarian Kemusu—Suharto was born in the village of Kemusu.

therefore, that many died in the Salemba Prison, many became paralytics after torture, and still others went mad. In the face of such sadism, perhaps even the Kempeitai¹⁰ would have blanched. And this was merely Salemba—one among the countless prisons in Jakarta and throughout the archipelago, where hundreds of thousands of human beings were held for years without trial. Who was responsible for the construction of this tropical Gulag?

History textbooks for Indonesia's schoolchildren speak of a colonial monster named Captain 'Turk' Westerling. They usually give the number of his victims in South Sulawesi in 1946 as forty thousand. It is certain that many more were wounded, many houses were burned down, much property looted and, here and there, women raped. The defence speech of Gus Dul asks the reader to reflect on an ice-cold 'native' monster, whose sadism far outstripped that of the infamous Captain. In the massacres of 1965–66, a minimum of six hundred thousand were murdered. If the reported deathbed confession of Sarwo Edhie to Mas Permadi is true, the number may have reached over two million.¹¹ Between 1977 and 1979, at least two hundred thousand human beings in East Timor died before their time, either killed directly or condemned to planned death through systematic starvation and its accompanying diseases. Amnesty International reckons that seven thousand people were extra-judicially assassinated in the Petrus Affair of 1983.¹² To these victims, we must add those in Aceh, Irian, Lampung, Tanjung Priok and elsewhere. At the most conservative estimate: eight hundred thousand lives, or twenty times the 'score' of Westerling. And all these victims, at the time they died, were regarded officially as fellow-nationals of the monster.

Latief speaks of other portions of the national tragedy which are also food for thought. For example, the hundreds of thousands of people who spent years in prison, without clear charges against them, and without any due process of law, besides suffering, on a routine basis, excruciat-

¹⁰ Japanese military police, famous for war-time brutality.

¹¹ Then Colonel Sarwo Edhie, commander of the elite Red Beret paratroops, was the operational executor of the massacres; Mas Permadi is a well-known psychic.

¹² The organized slaughter of petty hoodlums, often previously agents of the regime. A grim joke of the time called the death-squads of soldiers-in-mufti 'Petrus', as in St. Peter, an acronym derived from *Penembak Misterius* or *Mysterious Killers*.

ing torture. To say nothing of uncountable losses of property to theft and looting, casual, everyday rapes, and social ostracism for years, not only for former prisoners themselves, but for their wives and widows, children, and kinfolk in the widest sense. Latief's *J'accuse* was written twenty-two years ago, and many things have happened in his country in the meantime. But it is only now perhaps that it can acquire its greatest importance, if it serves to prick the conscience of the Indonesian people, especially the young. To make a big fuss about the corruption of Suharto and his family, as though his criminality were of the same gravity as Eddy Tansil's,¹³ is like making a big fuss about Idi Amin's mistresses, Slobodan Milošević's peculations, or Adolf Hitler's kitschy taste in art. That Jakarta's middle class, and a substantial part of its intelligentsia, still busy themselves with the cash stolen by 'Father Harto' (perhaps in their dreams they think of it as 'our cash') shows very clearly that they are still unprepared to face the totality of Indonesia's modern history. This attitude, which is that of the ostrich that plunges its head into the desert sands, is very dangerous. A wise man once said: Those who forget/ignore the past are condemned to repeat it. Terrifying, no?

Important as it is, Latief's defence, composed under exceptional conditions, cannot lift the veil which still shrouds many aspects of the September 30th Movement and its aftermath. Among so many questions, one could raise at least these. Why was Latief himself not executed, when Untung, Supardjo, Air Force Major Suyono, and others had their death sentences carried out? Why were Yani and the other generals killed at all, when the original plan was to bring them, as a group, face-to-face with Sukarno? Why did First Lieutenant Dul Arief of the Presidential Guard, who actually led the attacks on the generals' homes, subsequently vanish without a trace? How and why did all of Central Java fall into the hands of supporters of the September 30th Movement for a day and a half, while nothing similar occurred in any other province? Why did Colonel Suherman, Major Usman and their associates in Semarang also disappear without a trace? Who really was Syam alias Kamaruzzaman¹⁴—former official of the Recomba of the Federal

¹³ Famous high-flying Sino-Indonesian crook who escaped abroad with millions of embezzled dollars.

¹⁴ Allegedly the head of the Communist Party's secret Special Bureau for military affairs, and planner of the September 30th Movement.

State of Pasundan,¹⁵ former member of the anti-communist Indonesian Socialist Party, former intelligence operative for the Greater Jakarta Military Command at the time of the huge smuggling racket run by General Nasution and General Ibnu Sutowo out of Tanjung Priok, as well as former close friend of D. N. Aidit? Was he an army spy in the ranks of the Communists? Or a Communist spy inside the military? Or a spy for a third party? Or all three simultaneously? Was he really executed, or does he live comfortably abroad with a new name and a fat wallet?

Latief also cannot give us answers to questions about key aspects of the activities of the September 30th Movement, above all its political stupidities. Lieutenant-Colonel Untung's radio announcement that starting from October 1st, the highest military rank would be the one he himself held, automatically made enemies of all the generals and colonels in Indonesia, many of whom held command of important combat units. Crazy, surely? Why was the announced list of the members of the so-called Revolutionary Council so confused and implausible?¹⁶ Why did the Movement not announce that it was acting on the orders of President Sukarno (even if this was untrue), but instead dismissed Sukarno's own cabinet? Why did it not appeal to the masses to crowd into the streets to help safeguard the nation's head? It passes belief that such experienced and intelligent leaders as Aidit, Nyoto and Sudisman¹⁷ would have made such a string of political blunders. Hence the suspicion naturally arises that this string was deliberately arranged to ensure the Movement's failure. Announcements of the kind mentioned above merely confused the public, paralysed the masses, and provided easy pretexts for smashing the September 30th Movement itself. In this event, who really set up these bizarre announcements and arranged for their broadcast over national radio?

¹⁵ In 1948-49, the Dutch set up a series of puppet regimes in various provinces they controlled to offset the power and prestige of the independent Republic. Recomba was the name of this type of regime in Java, and Pasundan is the old name for the Sundanese-speaking territory of West Java.

¹⁶ The Movement proclaimed this Council as the temporary ruling authority in Indonesia, but its membership included right-wing generals, second-tier left-wingers, and various notoriously opportunist politicians, while omitting almost all figures with national reputations and large organizations behind them.

¹⁷ Secretary-General of the Communist Party.

Most of the main actors in, and key witnesses to, the crisis of 1965, have either died or been killed. Those who are still alive have kept their lips tightly sealed, for various motives: for example, Umar Wirahadikusumah, Omar Dhani, Sudharmono, Rewang, M. Panggabean, Benny Murdani, Mrs. Hartini, Mursyid, Yoga Sugama, Andi Yusuf and Kemal Idris.¹⁸ Now that thirty-five years have passed since 1965, would it not be a good thing for the future of the Indonesian nation if these people were required to provide the most detailed accounts of what they did and witnessed, before they go to meet their Maker?

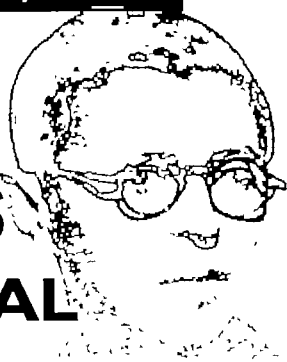
According to an old popular saying, the mills of God grind slowly but very fine. The meaning of this adage is that in the end the rice of truth will be separated from the chaff of confusion and lies. In every part of the world, one day or another, long-held classified documents, memoirs in manuscript locked away in cabinets, and diaries gathering dust in the attics of grandchildren will be brought to His mill, and their contents will become known to later generations. With this book of his, 'shut away' during twenty-one years of extraordinary suffering, Abdul Latief, with his astonishing strength, has provided an impressive exemplification of the old saying. Who knows, some day his accusations may provide valuable material for the script of that play in the repertoire of the National History Shadow-Theatre which is entitled . . . well, what else could it be?—Petrus Becomes King.

In traditional Javanese shadow-theatre, Petruk Dadi Ratu is a rollicking farce in which Petruk, a well-loved clown, briefly becomes King, with predictably hilarious and grotesque consequences. For Petrus, read Killer—see note 12 above. Suharto notoriously saw himself as a new kind of Javanese monarch, thinly disguised as a President of the Republic of Indonesia.

¹⁸ Omar Dhani. Air Force chief in 1965, sentenced to death, had his sentence reduced to life imprisonment, and was recently released. Sudharmono: for decades close aide to Suharto. Rewang: former candidate member of the Communist Party's Politbureau. Panggabean: top general in Suharto's clique and his successor as commander of Kostrad. Hartini: Sukarno's second wife in 1965. Mursyid: Sukarnoist general heading military operations for the Army Staff in 1965, subsequently arrested. Yusuf and Idris: both these generals played central roles in the overthrow of Sukarno.

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ROBERT POLLIN

ANATOMY OF CLINTONOMICS

THE PERFORMANCE of the US economy in the seven full years of the Clinton Presidency is widely regarded as having been an extraordinary success. There is no doubt that dramatic departures from past US economic trends have occurred under Clinton. Three, in particular, stand out: the attainment of balance, and then a surplus, in the Federal budget; the simultaneous declines in unemployment and inflation, in direct contradiction to the predictions of mainstream economic theory; and the historically unprecedented stock market boom.¹ The Clinton Administration and its supporters present these as the fruit of a new direction in economic policy—what Clinton himself terms a ‘Third Way’ between ‘those who said government was the enemy and those who said government was the solution’—an ‘information-age government’ that ‘must be smaller, must be less bureaucratic, must be fiscally disciplined, and focused on being a catalyst for new ideas.’²

Clintonites are not, of course, the only political force to boast of the discovery of a ‘Third Way’ between the legacy of Reagan and Thatcher and that of traditional social democracy (or what used to be termed ‘liberalism’ in the United States). Over the past five years, regimes ranging from those of Blair in Britain to Cardoso in Brazil have invoked the same slogan. But if its main theoretical development has come from the UK, in the work of Anthony Giddens, it is the practical record of the US economy that is often held to offer the best evidence that there is substance to the claims for the Third Way. The reality of economic policies and performance under Clinton has been very different from this ideological image. In most respects, it has represented a conventional centre-right agenda, akin—as Clinton himself once put it—to an ‘Eisenhower Republican’ stance updated to the post-Cold War epoch.³ Clinton’s Administration has essentially been defined by

across-the-board reductions in government spending, virtually unqualified enthusiasm for free trade, deregulation of financial markets, and only tepid, inconsistent efforts to regulate labour markets.

The performance of the American economy under Clinton has also been far more mixed than is acknowledged by boosters of his 'Third Way'. GDP growth and productivity gains have not exceeded the performance of previous presidential eras, even after official statisticians have revised national accounts upwards to reflect putative contributions to growth by computer technology, and genuine acceleration since 1996. Moreover, while unemployment and inflation have both fallen, the drop has been in large measure due to the declining ability of workers to secure wage increases even in persistently tight labour markets. Finally, the real economic gains of the period have rested on a fragile foundation—a stock market in which prices have exploded beyond any previous historical experience, inducing an enormous expansion of private expenditure on consumption. But because household incomes have not risen to anywhere near as far as financial asset values, the result has been unprecedented borrowing to pay for the spending spree. The springs of economic growth under Clinton have come from a levitating stock market setting off a debt-financed private consumption boom.

In referring thus far to the policies and agenda of the Clinton Administration, I have written as if these had emerged fully formed from the President's head or the briefs of his advisors. In fact, of course, the initiatives implemented, or even merely floated, under Clinton were also shaped by Wall Street, Congress and a host of other forces that converge in the lobbying vortex at Washington. To use Margaret's Thatcher's terms, Clinton is an archetypal 'consensus' rather than 'conviction' politician. As such, the policies he has enacted reflect a general consensus inside the Washington Beltway more than particular convictions of his own, such as they may be, or of anyone else. But clearly, as head of the Executive, Clinton bears ultimate responsibility for them—one, of course, he eagerly claims as a 'New Democrat'.

¹ I would like to thank Armagan Gezici and Josh Mason for their excellent research assistance and Jerry Epstein and Andrew Glyn for their constructive comments.

² See Clinton's address on Social Security, 9 February 1998, on the White House website.

³ See Bob Woodward, *The Agenda*, New York 1994, p. 165.

I. ECONOMIC POLICY UNDER CLINTON

Trade policy

The Clinton Administration's position on trade has been virtually identical to that of its Republican predecessors, proclaiming the universal virtues of free trade and pushing for Presidential authority to negotiate so-called 'fast track' agreements to further it, by-passing normal legislative scrutiny. Gestures towards labour or environmental concerns have been almost completely empty of content—the sound-bite sop to demonstrators at Seattle is a good example.⁴ The regime's actual position on trade is set out at length in the Economic Report of the President (ERP) for 1998, which under the rubric of 'Benefits of Market Opening', rehearses the standard neo-classical case for free trade—i.e. the Hecksher–Ohlin argument for efficiency gains through specialization, especially as economies of scale enhance productivity. Unsurprisingly, longstanding critiques of the assumptions behind the Hecksher–Ohlin model—in particular, its premisses of full employment and comparable technologies among trading partners—are ignored. Without these assumptions, it does not follow even from the orthodox model itself that all countries will necessarily benefit from trade opening, since liberalization can, for example, trigger a rise in unemployment.⁵ However, even if one accepts the assumptions, it is still well-known that trade opening produces losers as well as gainers. The Hecksher–Ohlin model itself stipulates a tendency toward factor price equalization among new commercial partners, which implies that when trade opens between a high and low wage country (for example, the US and Mexico), downward wage pressure will be felt among the workers in the high-wage economy. Within this framework, it has therefore long been understood that for trade to be equitable as well as efficient, even by minimal Pareto standards, losers from liberalization need to be recognized and compensated for their losses.

⁴ According to Steven Greenhouse and Joseph Kahn of the *New York Times*, 3 December 1999, Clinton's interview with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, in which he suggested that the WTO might employ sanctions to enforce core labour rights around the world, 'stunned the delegates, and even his own negotiators'.

⁵ See the interesting discussion of these issues as they apply to NAFTA by Mehree Larudee, 'Integration and Income Distribution under the North American Free Trade Agreement: the Experience in Mexico', in Dean Baker, Gerald Epstein and Robert Pollin, eds, *Globalization and Progressive Economic Policy*, Cambridge 1998.

If it is difficult to estimate the precise impact of NAFTA, or any other single trade agreement, on the work and wages of average workers in the US, another question can be dependably answered. Rhetorical flourishes aside, the Clinton Administration has offered virtually no compensation to workers whose incomes and/or job security have been hurt by its trade policies.⁶ Rather, the 1998 ERP reiterates mainstream arguments that trade is not primarily responsible for either the long-run wage stagnation for most American workers or the increased differentials between high- and low-wage workers. Rising inequality in the labour-force it attributes, instead, to 'skill-biased technological change', as the introduction of new, computer-based processes creates wage premia for workers able to handle them while depressing the income of workers unable to do so. David Howell has demonstrated fundamental flaws in this view, showing that increased wage inequality is actually more a reflection of social and institutional, rather than technological, changes—in particular, the steady weakening of American trade unions and growing hostility of American labour laws to the concerns of working people.⁷ It follows that even if the Clinton Administration has failed to address losses to US workers from its trade policies, it could still have compensated them with labour market policies and measures to redistribute income. What has been its record in these areas?

Labour policy

The short answer is that the Clinton Administration has done virtually nothing to advance the interests of organized labour or working people more generally. As longtime labour journalist David Moberg has commented, 'Clinton has probably identified less with organized labour than any Democratic President this century.'⁸ Of course, since the AFL-CIO is a permanent electoral prop of any Democratic candidate to the Presidency, its concerns cannot be completely disregarded in the Republican manner. Clinton thus supported a two-step rise in the minimum wage in 1996–97, from \$4.25 to its current level of \$5.15. But this

⁶ The ERP for 1998 states that the Administration has 'made significant reform of the existing trade adjustment assistance programme a priority'; in reality, these programmes remain minimal.

⁷ David Howell, 'Theory-Driven Facts and the Growth in Earnings Inequality', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Winter 1999, pp. 54–86.

⁸ Interview with Moberg by Josh Mason in November 1999.

modest increment has done little to reverse the precipitous fall in the real value of the minimum wage. In 1996 the real value of the \$4.25 rate was more than 40 percent below its buying-power in 1968. At the new rate of \$5.15, set in September 1997, the minimum wage is still over 30 percent below its real value in 1968, even though the economy has become 50 percent more productive over the past thirty years.⁹

The Administration also claims the Family and Medical Leave Act of August 1993 as a major accomplishment. The law requires employers with 50 or more employees within a 75-mile area to offer 12 weeks of unpaid leave per year for employees who had worked at least 1,250 hours within the past year, to be taken for health problems, the birth or adoption of a child or care for a family member. The exact boundaries of these grounds have been poorly defined, as also the conditions that employers—who may require that employees use up their sick and vacation days before taking advantage of the Act—may impose on them (can the leave be taken in blocks of a few hours, creating in effect a part-time job with full benefits, etc?). In the area of worker training, billed as a central plank of Clinton's pledge to 'Put People First', the Workforce Investment Act of August 1998 has consolidated the 40-odd Federal training programmes, introduced vouchers for workers to pay for private training, and created a nationwide jobs data-base.

Proposed in March 1993, but not passed, was a Striker Replacement Act that would have barred companies from permanently replacing strikers in disputes over working conditions (temporary replacements and strikes over pay were not to be affected), which eventually got fewer votes in the Senate than a similar bill under Bush. However, in perhaps the best example of the President's gesture politics, in March 1995 Clinton signed an executive order barring Federal contracts of over \$100,000 to companies which had permanently replaced striking workers. Initially the Senate threatened to block the directive, but in the end it desisted, perhaps persuaded by reported Administration arguments that virtually no major contractors would be affected. In February 1996 the order was struck down by the DC Circuit Court of Appeals, and the issue was dropped. During the year it was nominally in effect, not one contract was

⁹ See Robert Pollin and Stephanie Luce, *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy*, New York 1998, for a discussion of the historical trends in the minimum wage.

cancelled under the directive. On the other side of the ledger, Clinton did veto cuts in funding for the National Labor Relations Board and Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and a bill that would have effectively legalized company unions; and his appointments to the National Labor Relations Board, in particular Frederick Feinsein as general counsel, have been more favourable to trade-union leaderships than before. But the overall record of the Administration on labour issues is in any comparative sense remarkably thin, especially given its unqualified support for free trade in face of labour opposition. The net impact of Clinton's tenure can be seen from the fate of organized labour itself. Far from picking up after its long decline, union membership fell even further during the Clinton Presidency. In 1998 it stood at 13.9 percent of the total work-force, nearly three percentage points below the 16.8 percent to which it had dropped in 1988, Ronald Reagan's last year in office.

Fiscal Policy

Clinton's tax policies, lessening the highly regressive impact of the Reagan-Bush years, constitute the principal item in the Administration's claims to represent an enlightened alternative to the Republican rule of the eighties. The omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993, which raised taxes by \$240.4 billion over 5 years, increased the levy on incomes over \$140,000 from 30 to 36 percent, with an additional 10 percent surcharge for incomes over \$250,000. It also included a higher gasoline tax, a greater cap on income subject to Medicare hospital insurance tax, and a substantial extension of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), or direct income supplements to low-wage earners. Clinton's second major piece of legislation was the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, which reduced taxes by \$290 billion over 10 years—that is, reducing by half the revenue gains scheduled in the 1993 Act. The new law combined a range of child and education tax credits with lower taxes on inheritance and capital gains. Calculations by the Citizens for Tax Justice estimate that the net effect of the 1997 Act has been to cut taxes for the top 60 percent of the population, with the great bulk of the hand-out going to the top 20 percent.

Mishel, Bernstein and Schmitt have compared the total impact of the Clinton programme with the Reagan record by analysing the Federal tax rates of households at 1998 income levels, under the tax laws that pre-

vailed in various years between 1977–98. Table 1 summarizes their main findings.

TABLE 1 *Estimated effective Federal tax rates on
1998 income under prevailing tax law*

Income group	Percentage-point change	
	1977–89	1989–98
Bottom four-fifths	+0.5	-1.6
Bottom 20 pct.	+0.2	-4.6
21-40 pct.	+1.3	-1.8
41-60 pct.	+0.4	-0.3
61-80 pct.	0.0	+0.4
Top fifth	-0.3	+1.4
81-95 pct.	-0.3	+0.6
96-99 pct.	-1.9	+2.8
Top 1 pct.	-13.4	+7.7
All	+0.1	-1.0

Source: Muehl, Bernstein and Schmitt (1998)

As the table shows, between 1977–89, the bottom 80 percent of households experienced a slight increase of 0.5 percent in their tax obligations between 1977–89, and a somewhat bigger decline in these of 1.6 percent between 1989–98. Most of the tax reductions were concentrated among the least well-off 20 percent of households, who experienced a 4.6 percent decline in their fiscal burden—a drop primarily due to changes in the Earned Income Tax Credit. Correspondingly, the richest 20 percent of households experienced a small decline in their tax rates of 1.3 percent between 1977–89, which was reversed between 1989–98 when their rates rose by 1.4 percent. Here, by far the biggest swing was among the top 1 percent, who experienced a 13.4 percent tax cut between 1977–89

and a 7.7 percent tax increase in the period 1989–98. Thus the Clinton Administration did restore part of the progressive dimension of the tax system that was lost in the 1980s, but not all of it.

What is not clear from the table is the extent to which the stock market boom, and consequent rise in revenues from Capital Gains Tax, helped to swell government coffers and allow a balanced budget by 1997. Between 1992–97, revenues from capital gains rose from \$126.7 to \$362 billion—jumping from 2.7 to 5.0 percent of Treasury receipts. This is just one indicator of the extent to which Clinton's economic record has depended on the fortunes of Wall Street, a topic we consider in more detail below.

Expenditure policy

The over-riding objective of the Clinton Administration has been to bring government expenditures down, in line with its broader macroeconomic priority of deficit reduction. The extent of the spending cuts is set out in Table 2, which shows Federal Government expenditure patterns from 1992, the last year of the Bush Administration, until 1999. Between 1992–99, total Federal expenditures fell as a percentage of GDP from 21.9 to 18.6 percent, a decline of 14.9 percent. The most significant reduction slashed military spending from 4.7 to 3.0 percent of GDP between 1992–99, in absolute terms a drop of 36.7 percent. But there have been large cuts in other areas as well, including support for education (-9.2 percent), science (-19.1 percent), transportation (-11.2 percent) and income security (-16.0 percent).

The cuts in military spending, of course, reflect the end of the Cold War and consequent expectation of a widespread 'peace dividend'. While they have been substantial, what is more remarkable is that the annual military budget should have remained at \$300 billion, after the justification for the exorbitant arms race of the Cold War period has evaporated. Spending on arms remains 4.6 times greater than Federal outlays on education. It is also triple the size of the military budget of the 1930s as a proportion of GDP—the last decade before the World War and Cold War, when GDP itself was historically low. The fact is that in so far as the end of the Cold War has yielded a peace dividend, it has taken the form of an overall decrease in the size of the Federal Government rather than an increase in Federal support for any of the programmes supposedly

cherished by Clinton, such as better education, improved worker training, or alleviation of poverty.

TABLE 2 *Federal expenditures by function 1992–99*

	Percentage of GDP		Percent change
	1992	1999	1992–99
Total Expenditures	21.87	18.62	-14.9
Defense	4.72	2.99	-36.7
International	0.25	0.16	-36.1
Science	0.25	0.20	-19.1
Natural Resources	0.32	0.26	-18.3
Agriculture	0.24	0.23	-4.6
Transportation	0.52	0.46	-11.2
Education	0.71	0.65	-9.2
Health	1.41	1.54	9.4
Medicare	1.88	2.21	17.3
Income Security	3.12	2.62	-16.0
Social Security	4.56	4.24	-7.0
Veterans	0.54	0.47	-11.8
Justice	0.22	0.26	16.8
Interest	3.15	2.45	-22.3

Source: OMB, Budget of the United States, Historical Tables

The Administration's extension of the Earned Income Tax Credit has been its most significant anti-poverty initiative. The EITC originated under Ford's Republican Administration in 1975, when it covered 6.2 million families for an average credit (in 1998 dollars) of \$609 per family. The programme expanded under Carter, Reagan and Bush alike (1978, 1984, 1986, 1990). By 1992, the last year of the Bush Administration, it covered 14.1 million families, who received an average credit of \$1,076 (in 1998 dollars). By 1997 Clinton's add-on had extended it to an estimated 19.5 million families for an average credit of nearly \$1,600. Against this enlargement must be set the dismantling of welfare assistance programmes—what had been called Aid to Families with

Dependent Children (AFDC), and is now termed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Thus, while outlays for EITC rose (in 1998 dollars) by \$14.7 billion, from \$8.5 to \$23.2 billion between 1992–98, spending on ‘family support’ fell by \$2 billion, from \$17.5 to \$15.5 billion. This was not the only area of welfare to contract under Clinton. Expenditure on food stamps and other nutritional assistance dropped by \$4.3 billion, from \$37.8 to \$33.5 billion between 1992–98—a decline reflecting an increase in the percentage of households who are not receiving food assistance even though their income level is low enough to qualify them to receive it. Between 1995–97, the decline in the number of people receiving food stamps—4.4 million—was five times greater than the decline in the number of people living in poverty, and was accompanied by a dramatic increase in the pressure on private soup kitchens and food pantries.

While the full reasons for the fall in public food assistance under Clinton are not entirely clear, it appears that the primary factor has been his campaign to ‘end welfare as we know it’. The official attack on dependency has led both to greater stigma in receiving public assistance, and to greater difficulties in securing food stamps. When the pre-Clinton welfare system was still functioning, a high proportion of recipients took their food stamps and cash assistance at the same time.¹⁰ The result of Clinton’s policies has been a complete standstill of expenditure on all public and food assistance programmes as a proportion of GDP, which remained at 1.3 percent in both 1992 and 1998. Clinton’s defenders, of course, would reply that the Administration has replaced a bad programme—welfare—with a good one, because the EITC creates incentives for work and does not discourage parents from living as a family unit. But if the EITC does correct some of the failings of the older welfare system, it also creates new and no less serious ones. Moving poor and unskilled women from welfare onto the labour market exerts downward pressure on wages, and the minimum wage itself is still too low to allow even a full-time worker to keep just herself and only one child above the official poverty line. A woman in this position will receive EITC to supplement her income, but she will also now have to pay for childcare

¹⁰ For discussion of the declining use of food stamps, see Sharon Parrott and Stacy Dean, ‘Food stamps can help low-income families put food on the table’, Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities (website), Washington DC 1999; and Andrew Revkin, ‘A plunge in use of food stamps causes concern’, *New York Times* 25 February 99.

and get less support from food assistance programmes. Structurally, the interactive effects of a low minimum wage and widened EITC have allowed business to continue to offer rock-bottom wages, while shifting onto taxpayers the cost of alleviating the poverty of even those holding full-time jobs. In sum, the Clinton Administration's anti-poverty programmes have not increased income transfers to the poor as a share of GDP. After allowing for the increased costs of childcare, the overall conditions of life for America's most destitute households may have worsened during the Clinton Administration.

Macroeconomic and regulatory policies

Throughout, the over-riding economic objective of Clinton's Presidency has been deficit reduction. At its outset, the Administration adopted the doctrine that stringent control of Federal expenditure was a condition of lowering interest rates, which alone could stimulate private-sector investment and therewith overall growth. We have seen the pattern of spending cuts to which this commitment has led. Even after a balanced budget was attained in 1997, Clinton pressed on—now with the aim of reducing and even eliminating outstanding Federal debt. Concomitantly, monetary policy has been loosened, as Greenspan at the Federal Reserve has tolerated lower rates of unemployment than Volcker, while remaining vigilant against upward wage pressures. Nevertheless, interest rates have remained well above historical levels.

Financial markets, meanwhile, have been treated with a more generous hand than labour markets. The Federal Reserve and the Treasury organized lavish bail-outs for investors in the Mexican, East Asian and Long-Term Capital Management crises—interventions that succeeded in preventing any cascading collapse in private credit markets, and protecting the interests of major wealth-holders. By validating speculative operations that would otherwise have ended in disaster, these bail-outs have, of course, been primers in 'moral hazard', setting the stage for further excesses that could trigger more severe crises later on. But this liberality is consistent with its approach to financial regulation at large. For the other major landmark of the Clinton Administration has been repeal of the Glass–Steagall legacy of the Depression years. The barriers Glass–Steagall set up between commercial and investment banking, and its obstruction of banking across state lines, were in practice no longer effective instruments of financial stability, or of widespread

access to credit, under conditions of global integration. But no attempt was made by the Clinton Administration to seek more contemporary means of securing the stabilizing and redistributive ends Glass–Steagall had aimed at, such as a combination of taxes on speculative transactions and lower reserve requirements on loans for productive investments.¹² Quite the contrary. Emblematically, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, after orchestrating the elimination of Glass–Steagall, was among the first to benefit personally from it, moving from Washington to become Co-Chairman of the newly merged banking conglomerate Citigroup—a fusion of the former commercial bank Citicorp and the former investment house Travelers that would never have been permitted under any reasonable interpretation of Glass–Steagall. In short, by both deregulating financial markets and diminishing the supply of low-risk Treasury securities,¹³ the Clinton administration has done much to encourage speculative over-drive.

II. ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE UNDER CLINTON

Economic performance in the United States under the Clinton Administration has been widely hailed as an unqualified success.¹⁴ But looking at some basic indicators in a comparative historical perspective, presented in Tables 3–6 below, we observe a much more mixed performance. There have been some significant departures from historic trends. But, given the centre-right direction of policy under Clinton, it should not be surprising that their benefits have been skewed toward the wealthy. Moreover, virtually all the economic achievements of the Clinton years have been tied to the extraordinary performance of the stock market, which has concurrently generated a highly fragile financial structure.

¹² For such solutions, see Robert Pollin, 'Financial Structures and Egalitarian Economic Policy', NLR (I) 214, November–December 1995, pp. 36–61.

¹³ These are unique instruments because they are free of default risk—though still, of course, subject to market risk, especially in an inflationary environment.

¹⁴ The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, announced on the occasion of Clinton's renomination of Greenspan as Chairman of the Federal Reserve: 'The US economy is enjoying its best performance in more than a generation with low unemployment and low inflation. If the current expansion lasts through February, something generally expected, it will surpass the 1960s as the longest period of uninterrupted economic growth in US history': 4 January 2000.

Table 3 presents some basic macro statistics—GDP growth, productivity, unemployment and inflation. In the upper panel of the table, the data are grouped by presidential eras—I have combined Kennedy–Johnson, Nixon–Ford and Reagan–Bush, as well as showing the Carter and Clinton years separately. In the lower panel, I group the same data according to NBER business cycles, as a check on the reliability of presidential eras as a measure of economic trends.¹⁴

TABLE 3 *Macro Performance Indicators*

A. Performance by Presidential Terms (all figures are percentages)

	1961–68 Kennedy– Johnson	1969–76 Nixon– Ford	1977–80 Carter	1981–92 Reagan– Bush	1993–99 Clinton
GDP real growth	4.8	2.7	3.4	2.9	3.7
Productivity growth (for non-farm business sector)	3.4	2.1	0.7	1.7	1.8
Unemployment rate	4.8	5.8	6.5	7.1	5.6
Inflation rate (measured by CPI)	2.3	6.5	10.3	4.3	2.5

B. Performance by NBER Business Cycle Averages (percentages)

	1960–69	1970–79	1980–90	1991–99
GDP real growth	4.4	3.2	2.9	3.2
Productivity growth (for non-farm business sector)	2.9	2.0	1.4	2.0
Unemployment rate	4.8	6.2	7.1	5.8
Inflation rate (measured by CPI)	2.5	7.5	5.3	2.7

Sources: National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA), Bureau of Labor Statistics

These indicators make it clear that, at least through 1999, the Clinton years have not been unusually successful in historical terms. Most strikingly, the Clinton period has not approached the macro performance of the Kennedy/Johnson era, when both GDP (4.8 vs. 3.7 percent) and productivity growth (3.4 vs. 1.8 percent) increased much more rapidly, while average unemployment (4.8 vs. 5.6 percent) was substantially lower. The figures for Clinton will improve when 2000 is included in these aggregates. Nevertheless, even allowing for an additional strong year, the Clinton performance will not match that of the Kennedy/Johnson era in GDP growth, productivity or unemployment. On the other hand, the rate of inflation under Clinton has been kept down to the lowest range level of the Kennedy/Johnson years, and declined over time, whereas inflation took off towards the end of Johnson's Presidency as costs of the war in Vietnam escalated. Of course, a decline in inflation in itself does not tell us much about who gains or loses from it—it might indicate slack labour markets of no benefit to wage-earners.

Judged by less stringent standards than the 1960s, however, the macro-economic record of the Clinton years compares favourably with that of Nixon/Ford, Carter and Reagan/Bush. GDP growth was higher and both unemployment and inflation were lower. Productivity growth was still slow, even relative to the Nixon/Ford years. But the overall performance of the American economy has been stronger, if not to a dramatic degree. Clinton's tenure, of course, has been graced by the circumstance that no recession has occurred during his Presidency.¹⁵ If we consider the relative performance of the economy in the full business cycle of 1991–98 as against its predecessors, the 1990s do not stand out relative to either the 1970s or the 1980–90 cycle, and do still worse relative to the 1960–69 cycle. In short, it is hard to make a serious case that the US economy

¹⁴ The cyclical data are organized on a peak-to-peak basis, through reference dates established by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). I have derived yearly peak dates from the NBER monthly peaks. When the NBER peak month falls between January and September of a given year, that year becomes the cyclical peak year, otherwise it is the following year. In addition, I have merged two sets of cycles into a single cycle—those for 1970–73/1974–79 and 1980–81/1982–90.

¹⁵ On a more technical note, revisions in the methods used for measuring inflation and investment have also made the Clinton record look better. For a discussion of the problems and potential biases in the new statistics, see Dean Baker, 'What's New in the Nineties', typescript, Centre for Economic and Policy Analysis, Washington DC 1999.

in the 1990s has been unusually robust once we take account of the 1990–91 recession. Of course, supporters of Clinton would claim that his ability to avoid a recession since 1993 has been a major accomplishment in itself.

Changing composition of GDP

Further perspective on the macroeconomic record of the Clinton years is offered by Table 4, showing the breakdown of GDP into component expenditure categories—consumption, government, investment and net exports. Two sets of figures stand out here. The first we have already noted: there has been a drastic contraction of government spending, which at 18.2 percent of GDP is far below that of any previous presidential period. What we also see in Table 4 is that the slack created by the fall

TABLE 4 *Components of GDP (in percentages)*

A. Performance by Presidential Terms

	1961–68 Kennedy– Johnson	1969–76 Nixon– Ford	1977–80 Carter	1981–92 Reagan– Bush	1993–99 Clinton
Consumption	61.7	62.2	62.6	64.9	67.0
Government	22.4	21.9	20.0	20.6	18.2
Investment	15.5	15.9	18.2	16.1	16.3
Net Exports	0.4	-0.05	-0.9	-1.6	-1.5

B. Performance by NBER Business Cycle Averages

	1960–69	1970–79	1980–90	1991–99
Consumption	61.8	62.4	64.4	66.9
Government	22.4	21.2	20.6	18.7
Investment	15.5	16.7	16.7	15.7
Net Exports	0.3	-0.3	-1.7	-1.3

Sources: National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA), Economic web page

Notes: In the B panel, NBER cycles are grouped on a peak-to-peak basis. For brevity, two sets of cycles—1970–73/1974–79 and 1980–81/1982–90—have been merged.

in public expenditure has been taken up by rocketing private consumption, which at 67 percent of GDP is more than five percentage points higher than during the Kennedy/Johnson boom. It is clear from these figures that it is the rise in consumer spending that has been the driving force of aggregate demand under Clinton, allowing government expenditure to fall without generating a slowdown in overall growth. Thus, to understand what has sustained growth in these years, we need to look at the bases for the expansion of private consumption. A consideration of financial market practices and performance in the Clinton period throws a good deal of light on this question.

Financial market behaviour

The most dramatic economic change of the Clinton presidency has been the transformation of the country's financial structure by the stock bubble and shifts associated with it. Table 5 provides some indication of what has been involved. During the Kennedy/Johnson and Reagan/Bush periods, the Standard and Poor index of the stock prices of the top 500 companies in the economy rose at a rapid annual rate of 6.2 percent. During the Nixon/Ford and Carter years, the S&P actually fell in real terms. Under Clinton, it has registered an annual growth rate of 17.6 percent that has no historical precedent.

The performance of the stock market under Clinton becomes even more astonishing when measured against GDP during the various presidential eras. In theory, fluctuations in equity prices over a full business cycle are supposed to reflect the underlying performance of the real economy. Thus, by measuring the difference between growth of the S&P 500 and GDP, we can observe the extent to which the stock market is responding to real economic developments. Here again, the Clinton experience is without precedent. Since 1993 the rise in stock prices has been 13.9 percent above that of the real economy. Even in the Reagan and Bush years, during which economic policy overwhelmingly favoured the prerogatives of capital, and financial capital in particular, stock prices rose only 3.3 percent faster than GDP.

Table 5 also presents some data on changes in household financial patterns during the Clinton boom. The third row of figures suggests the degree to which the consumption boom has been debt financed. Household debt—including mortgage and consumer debt—has ratch-

eted upward dramatically during Clinton's tenure, to reach 94.2 percent of disposable income. This compares with a ratio of 77.8 percent during the Reagan/Bush years, itself an unprecedented level compared with any previous period. The next column, showing household debt relative to total financial assets, indicates how this expansion of debt has been collateralized—by a rise in asset values rather than incomes. Thus, we see that the liability/asset ratio of American households has not risen at all during the Clinton Presidency, even while the debt/income ratio was shooting up. But the composition of household assets has changed markedly. Traditionally, American property-owners have maintained a steady

TABLE 5 *Financial market indicators*

A. Performance by Presidential Terms

	1961-68 Kennedy- Johnson	1969-76 Nixon- Ford	1977-80 Carter	1981-92 Reagan- Bush	1993-99 Clinton
S & P 500 real average annual growth rate (%)	6.2	-3.6	-2.8	6.2	17.6
S & P 500 real growth minus GDP real growth (% gap)	+1.4	-6.3	-6.2	+3.3	+13.9
Total household liabilities / disposable pers- onal income (%)	65.8	64.3	70.0	77.8	94.2
Total household liabilities / fin- ancial assets (%)	17.1	19.1	22.2	23.0	21.8
Household bank deposits + govt. securities / total financial assets (%)	25.1	25.4	26.6	26.0	17.8
Real Interest Rate (10-year Treasury bond CPI rate)	2.2	0.6	-1.2	5.5	3.7

Sources: National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA), *Economic web page*.

share of their holdings in insured bank deposits and non-defaultable Treasury securities—prior to the Clinton period, somewhere between 25–27 percent. Under Clinton, this ‘safe asset’ proportion has fallen to 17.8 percent, a stark departure from previous patterns.¹⁶

Finally Table 5 reports figures on real interest rates for 10-year Treasury bonds. It shows that rates did fall in the Clinton period relative to Reagan/Bush years, from an average of 5.5 to 3.7 percent. But the 3.7 percent rate under Clinton is still far higher than the level of any previous presidential era. Indeed, for the whole post-war period 1947–79, the average real Treasury rate was 1.2 percent, less than a third of its level

TABLE 5 *Financial market indicators (continued)*

B. Performance by NBER Business Cycle Averages

	1960–69	1970–79	1980–90	1991–99
S & P 500 real average annual growth rate (%)	2.9	-3.5	5.7	15.9
S & P 500 real growth minus GDP real growth (% gap)	-1.5	-6.7	+2.8	+12.7
Total household liabilities / disposable personal income (%)	65.1	65.8	75.7	92.3
Total household liabilities / financial assets (%)	17.0	20.2	22.7	22.2
Household bank deposits + govt. securities / total financial assets (%)	23.2	26.1	26.6	18.5
Real Interest Rate (10-year Treasury bond CPI rate)	2.1	0.0	5.1	3.9

Note. In the B panel, NBER cycles are grouped on a peak-to-peak basis. For brevity, two sets of cycles—1970–73/1974–79 and 1980–81/1982–90—have been merged.

in the Clinton period.⁷ These figures make it difficult to argue that the sharp increase in household debt is a response to low interest rates. The reality is that these have been low only relative to the unprecedented peaks of the Reagan/Bush years: they are high by any other historical benchmark. The basic justification given by the Clinton Administration for its drive to eliminate the Federal deficit was that this alone could cut interest rates dramatically, by reducing aggregate demand for credit and enabling the Federal Reserve to pursue a looser monetary policy. In practice, however, rates have fallen relative to the Reagan/Bush years, when Federal deficits soared, but they remain historically high despite the attainment of fiscal balance. The claim that government deficits alone have been responsible for high real interest rates since the 1980s clearly needs to be rethought.

Conditions for workers and the poor

Finally, how have working people and the poor fared during Clinton's Presidency? Table 6 suggests some measure of their fate. The results are highly unfavourable to Clinton. Despite the relatively strong macro performance—to say nothing of the stock-market boom—both the average wages for non-supervisory workers and the earnings of those in the lowest 10th percent decile of wage distribution not only remain well below those of the Nixon–Ford and Carter Administrations, but are actually lower even than those of the Reagan–Bush years. Moreover, wage inequality—as measured by the ratio of the 90th to 10th percent decile—has increased sharply during Clinton's tenure in office, even relative to the Republican heyday of the eighties.

Nor has there been any significant reduction in poverty under Clinton, even relative to the Reagan–Bush years. If low rates of unemployment have been a positive feature of the 1990s, it is still quite possible that the overall condition of the poor will prove to have worsened in Clinton's final years of office, as the dismantling of Federal welfare programmes

⁶ Wynne Godley argues persuasively that these financial patterns in the household sector cannot last. See *Seven Unsustainable Processes: Medium-Term Prospects and Policies for the United States and the World*, Levy Institute, Annandale 1999.

⁷ For the historical figures on interest rates, see Robert Pollin and Gary Dymski, 'The Costs and Benefits of Financial Instability: Big Government and the Minsky Paradox', in Dymski and Pollin, eds, *New Perspectives in Monetary Macroeconomics*, Ann Arbor 1994, pp. 369–402.

TABLE 6 *Measures of well-being for workers and the poor*

A. Performance by Presidential Terms

	1961-68 Kennedy- Johnson	1969-76 Nixon- Ford	1977-80 Carter	1981-92 Reagan- Bush	1993-98 Clinton
Average wage for nonsupervisory workers (1998 dollars)	\$11.53	\$13.17	\$13.51	\$12.82	\$12.37
Average wage for 10th percent decile (in 1998 dollars)	—	\$6.14	\$6.32	\$5.68	\$5.52
Ratio of 90th/10th percent decile wages	—	3.7	3.6	4.1	4.4
Individual poverty rate (%)	17.5	11.9	11.9	14.0	13.8

B. Performance by NBER Business Cycle Averages

	1960-69	1970-79	1980-90	1991-98
Average wage for nonsupervisory workers (1998 dollars)	\$11.54	\$13.36	\$12.95	\$12.35
Average wage for 10th percent decile (in 1998 dollars)	—	\$6.24	\$5.73	\$5.54
Ratio of 90th/10th percent decile wages	—	3.6	4.1	4.3
Individual poverty rate (%)	17.5	11.8	13.8	14.0

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Mishel, Bernstein and Schmitt (1999)

Notes: Wage data for decile groupings begins in 1973. Because of some gaps in the available data for 1999, all figures in the table end with 1998. In the B panel, NBER cycles are grouped on a peak-to-peak basis. For brevity, two sets of cycles—1970-73/1974-79 and 1980-81/1982-90—have been merged.

proceeds. We do not observe any noticeably different patterns if the data are divided by business cycles rather than presidential periods. But we do know that the well-being of working and poor people alike declines during recessions, as unemployment rises and wages fall. This is why the figures for 1991–98, which include a recession, show lower wage rates and higher levels of poverty than during Clinton's term of office. Had he presided over an interlude of recession, the record would have been even more severe.

III. EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENTS UNDER CLINTON

Still, whatever else may be said of macroeconomic performance under the Clinton Presidency, the simultaneous fall of unemployment and inflation has defied the expectations of virtually all orthodox economists. In 1999, according to official figures, some 4.2 percent of the work-force were jobless, while inflation was running at 2.4 percent—higher than the 1.6 percent rate for 1998, but otherwise lower than all but two other years since 1965. Most economists, adhering to the Natural Unemployment/Non-Accelerating Inflation Rate of Unemployment doctrines dominant since the early 1970s, had long predicted that unemployment in the region of 4 percent must lead to headlong inflation. They argued that policy-makers therefore had a duty to maintain unemployment at its NAIRU rate—that is, the level below which inflation would take off. To this end, it was generally believed that unemployment needed to be perhaps as high as 6 percent.

What happened to the inflation/unemployment trade-off?

What caused the dramatic shift in the trade-off between unemployment and inflation, and to what extent has the Clinton Administration been responsible for it? Some leading economists have begun to concede that the NAIRU is subject to change over time. Robert Gordon, for one, has concluded from an extensive econometric analysis of the past two decades that NAIRU is 'time-varying'—falling, for example, from 6.2 percent in 1990 to 5.6 by mid-1996.¹⁸ Douglas Staiger, James Stock and

¹⁸ Robert Gordon, 'The Time-Varying NAIRU and its Implications for Economic Policy', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 1997, 11:1, pp. 11–32.

Mark Watson concur, finding that NAIRU in 1997 was between 5.5 and 5.9 percent, a full percentage point below its level for the early 1980s. They also admit that 'the most striking feature of these estimates is their lack of precision'.¹⁹ Their NAIRU estimate not only varies over time but also has the capacity to range widely at a given point in time.

The general thrust of these broad econometric findings appears solid enough. Indeed, they are difficult to dispute precisely because they are so broad. But in focusing exclusively on point estimates, confidence intervals, and their variation over time, they miss the fundamental question that leaps out from these results—namely, what makes a 'time-varying' NAIRU vary in the first place? It is remarkable that leading economists who have devoted so much time to estimating values for NAIRU almost completely neglect this question. Occasionally, however, a few revealing hints are dropped as asides. Gordon, for example writes:

The two especially large changes in the NAIRU . . . are the increase between the early and late 1960s and the decrease in the 1990s. The late 1960s were a time of labor militancy, relatively strong unions, a relatively high minimum wage and a marked increase in labor's share in national income. The 1990s have been a time of labor peace, relatively weak unions, a relatively low minimum wage and a slight decline in labor's income share.²⁰

Gordon also casually refers to intensified world competition in product and labour markets, and increased flows of unskilled immigrant labour into the United States, as factors contributing to a declining NAIRU. Though again these observations are mere asides in Gordon's paper, the overall point is clear: it is changes in the balance of forces between capital and labour, and the growing integration of the US into the global economy—which has made it more difficult for US firms to raise prices and US workers to improve wages—that have been the main forces driving the NAIRU down. Gordon's general hunch is fully consistent with the econometric results generated by Cara Lown and Robert Rich of the New York Federal Reserve Bank. They found that, between 1990 and 1995, the stagnation of wages and benefits by itself fully explains the lack of inflationary pressure at low levels of unemployment.²¹ Data for the

¹⁹ Douglas Staiger, James Stock and Mark Watson, 'The NAIRU, Unemployment and Monetary Policy', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 1997, 11:1, pp. 33–50.

²⁰ 'The Time-Varying NAIRU', p. 30.

Lown and Rich study end in 1995. Since then, additional factors have contributed to dampening inflation. For one, energy prices fell substantially over 1997–98. In addition, the East Asian financial crisis triggered currency devaluations throughout the region, making American imports cheaper. For their part, workers—especially in the computer industry—have been increasingly willing to follow their employers in taking stock options as part of their total compensation package. That may also be reducing any upward wage pressure, though we should remember that only 21 percent of Americans own any equity outside their share of retirement funds. Finally, of course, we do indeed observe dramatic price increases in this business cycle, if at the stock exchange rather than the supermarket.

The central fact remains, however, that wage gains during the Clinton boom have remained well below those of any other expansion, much less a period of near full employment. This underlying reality is captured in a *Business Week* report of December 1999 that substantial majorities of US citizens expressed acute dissatisfaction with various features of their economic situation. For example, 51 percent of American workers who were interviewed declared that they ‘felt cheated by their employer’. When asked their view of what *Business Week* termed the ‘current productivity boom’, 63 percent said that the boom has not raised their earnings, and 62 percent that it had not improved their job security.²² Such negative popular reactions are very striking, given the persistent portrayal by the media of the Clinton economy as a time of unparalleled prosperity. Behind them lies the primary explanation for the collapse of the trade-off between unemployment and inflation, openly acknowledged by Alan Greenspan in his regular semi-annual testimony to Congress in July 1997. Saluting the economy’s performance that year as ‘extraordinary’ and ‘exceptional’, he remarked that a major factor contributing to its outstanding achievement was ‘a heightened sense of job insecurity and, as a consequence, subdued wages.’²³ This ‘heightened sense of job insecurity’ lies at the very foundation of the Clinton administration’s economic legacy.

²² Cara Lown and Robert Rich, ‘Is there an Inflation Puzzle?’ *Federal Reserve Bank of New York Economic Policy Review*, December 1997, pp. 51–69.

²³ See *Business Week* 27 December 1999.

²⁴ Greenspan’s testimony can be found on the Federal Reserve site at www.bog.frb.fed.us/boarddocs/hh/1997/july/testimony.htm

The stock market boom

The stock market bubble has been the other extraordinary development associated with the Clinton Presidency. What makes it extraordinary is the effect it has had outside Wall Street, on the American and world economy. Dean Baker has summed up its impact as follows:

The run-up in stock prices, in excess of GDP growth, has added more than \$8 trillion in financial wealth over the last nine years. A conventional rule of thumb is that \$1 of stock wealth increases consumption by 3 cents. This calculation would imply that the \$8 trillion of excessive stock market accumulation over the last nine years has increased consumption by \$240 billion compared with a situation where the stock market had only kept pace with GDP. This additional consumption corresponds almost exactly to the 4.5 percentage point drop in the saving rate that the economy has experienced during this period.²⁴

The rise in debt-financed consumption has, in turn, maintained a buoyant level of aggregate demand in the US economy, despite the fact that government expenditures have declined and the trade deficit has grown. At the same time, as we have seen, the Federal Government received nearly \$50 billion more in revenue in 1997 relative to 1992 from capital gains taxes—by far the largest proportional increase from any fiscal source. Thus the stock market boom has been central both to the creation of a fiscal surplus under Clinton and—through wealth-driven increases in consumption—to counteraction of the negative effects of that surplus on aggregate demand. The boom has, moreover, enabled firms to meet pension fund obligations by rising portfolio values rather than transferring revenues into retirement funds. This in turn has released internal cash-flow for distribution as dividends to shareholders or investment in new capital. Rising share prices have also fuelled the pace of corporate mergers, by enabling firms to buy other companies through stock transfers rather than having either to borrow or pay cash.

Conventional explanations of the bubble give pride of place to the dramatic advances in computer and internet-related technology, which are held to have engendered formidable productivity gains. But we have seen that productivity has not registered exceptional growth under Clinton,

²⁴ 'What's New in the Nineties'.

even after upward revision of national accounts to make special provision for computer-driven improvements. It is true that there has been a spurt to an annual average rate of 2.6 percent between 1996 and 1999, as against the dismal 0.8 percent of 1993-95. But such productivity figures are hardly a sufficient basis to underwrite the Clinton stock boom—at the much higher annual rate of productivity growth of 3.4 percent in the Kennedy/Johnson period, nothing close to this speculative spree occurred. Moreover, current research casts doubt on the magnitude of the recent spurt itself.²⁵ Of course, the promise of future internet-led leaps in productivity remains. But even if we allow that possibility, it still does not explain the magnitude of the current stock price inflation. As Doug Henwood notes:

The Internet stocks that have headlined the mania over the last year are without known precedent in US financial history. At its highs in early April, the market capitalization of Priceline.com, which sells airline tickets on the web and has microscopic revenues, was twice that of United Airlines and just a hair under American's. America Online was worth nearly as much as Disney and Time Warner combined, and more than GM and Ford combined. Yahoo was capitalized a third higher than Boeing, and eBay nearly as much as CBS. At its peak, AOL sported a price/earnings ratio of 720, Yahoo! of 1,468 and eBay of 9,571 . . . Oh yes, enthusiasts respond, but these are bets on a grand future. But previous world-transformative events have never been capitalized like this . . . RCA peaked at a P/E of 73 in 1929. Xerox traded at a P/E of 123 in 1961. Apple maxed out at a P/E of 150 in 1980. And all these companies were pretty quick to turn a profit, and once they did, their growth rates were ripping. In the so-called Nifty Fifty era of the early 1970s, the half-hundred glamour stocks that led the market sported P/Es of forty to sixty . . . And those evaluations were once legendary for their extravagance.²⁶

²⁵ For example, Marcello Esteveño and Saul Lach of the Federal Reserve argue that official figures for the manufacturing sector should be deflated by 0.5 percent once the outsourcing of employment to temporary help agencies is taken into account. See 'Measuring Temporary Labour Outsourcing in US Manufacturing', NBER Working Paper 7421, October 1999. James Medoff of Harvard and his associate Andrew Harless suggest that activities related to the Y2K transition also greatly inflated recent productivity figures. In a similar vein, Robert Gordon of Northwestern contends that since 1995 virtually all increases in productivity have occurred in the manufacturing of computer hardware. He claims that 'there has been no productivity acceleration in the 99 per cent of the economy located outside' this sector. For a summary of these views, see James Grant 'Wired Office, Same Workers', *New York Times*, 1 May 2000, p. A 27.

²⁶ 'The United States', *Monthly Review*, July 1999, p. 129.

Causes of the bubble

Given the historically unique character of the bubble of the 1990s, it will be some time before we have a definitive account of its causes. But for the moment, and still to some extent groping in the dark, we may point to five significant factors:

1. Financial deregulation. Kindleberger and others have amply documented the way in which speculative manias have historically recurred in financial markets.²⁷ After the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the slump of the 1930s, post-war governments in all major capitalist economies set in place far-reaching systems of financial regulation to prevent renewed bouts of destructive speculation. In consequence, for the first 25 years after the end of World War II, stock markets were relatively tranquil. This experience suggests one simple explanation for the Clinton boom: that in the absence of effective regulation, speculative excess will inevitably occur in financial markets, though exactly how bubbles will emerge and develop can never be known in advance. In this sense, asset inflation has broken all bounds in the 1990s because the Clinton Administration has operated no adequate controls to inhibit its development.
2. Increased inequality and profitability. As we have seen, the rewards of economic growth under Clinton have been claimed increasingly by the wealthy. Wages have continued to stagnate or decline for most workers, even as GDP and productivity growth have risen. With wages held down as output and productivity rise, profits inevitably increase. Under Clinton they have reached a thirty-year peak. In 1997 the share of total corporate income accruing to profits was 21.6 percent, as opposed to cyclical highs under Nixon (1973) of 18.0 percent, Carter (1979) of 17.4 percent, and even Reagan (1989) of 18.4 percent.²⁸ The escalation of profits under the Clinton Presidency in turn feeds expectations of further increases in profitability, in conditions where the political system continues to favour so heavily the interests of the rich, regardless of whether there are Democratic

²⁷ See especially Charles Kindleberger, *Manias, Crashes and Panics: A History of Financial Crisis*, New York 1977.

²⁸ See Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein and John Schmitt, *The State of Working America 1998-1999*, Ithaca 1999.

or Republican incumbents in the White House. If Clinton's tax policies are less regressive than Reagan's, they are more so than Nixon's, while in the areas of trade, financial and even labour markets, the trend of his Administration has been strongly pro-business.

3. Changes in US wealth-holding patterns. We have seen the extent to which American households have moved their portfolios out of low-risk bank deposits and Treasury securities into riskier assets—above all equities. The rise of mutual funds and derivative markets, through which the risks associated with stock-ownership are spread, has certainly contributed to this shift. But it also suggests that property-owners have come to believe that equities are now less of a hazard than they have been at any prior point in history.²⁹ The Clinton Administration alone is obviously not responsible for creating this state of mind among investors. In part, such thinking stems from the rise in profitability and, especially, the positive feedback effects of favourable returns on investor expectations. Alan Greenspan himself has repeatedly tried to dampen such 'irrational exuberance' among wealth-holders. But the enthusiasm with which the Federal Reserve and the Clinton Administration have pushed for the deregulation of financial markets has more than counterbalanced any downward jawboning efforts by Greenspan.³⁰
4. Shifts in foreign wealth-holding patterns. From 1989 onwards, the US has become a net debtor nation, as foreign-owned assets in the country have exceeded American-owned assets abroad. Through the 1990s, foreign wealth-holders have increasingly purchased dollar-denominated assets in US financial markets. By the end of 1998, the magnitude of the foreign debt had reached \$1.5 trillion,

²⁹ Recent business-book titles giving graphic expression of this state of mind include *Dow 36,000* by James Glassman and Kevin Hassett; *Dow 40,000: Strategies for Profiting from the Greatest Bull Market in History* by David Elias, and, not to be outdone, *Dow 100,000: Fact or Fiction* by Charles Kadlec and Ralph Acampora.

³⁰ Robert Rubin, of course, was an unequivocal champion of financial deregulation while at the Treasury. Current Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers is no less fervent a promoter of deregulation, even though as an academic economist he once showed apprehension of its dangers: see Lawrence and Victoria Summers, 'When financial markets work too well: a cautious case for a securities transaction tax', *Journal of Financial Services Research*, 1989, no. 3, pp. 261–86.

equal to 18 percent of GDP—tripling in size over the previous 24 months.³¹ This inflow of foreign savings is, of course, the other side of the persistent American deficit. Indeed, it is the continued willingness of foreigners to accept payment in dollars and to invest in dollar-denominated assets that alone has made it possible. Here the instability of stock markets across the rest of the world has been critical in making American assets so attractive. Independently of the Wall Street bubble, foreign investors prefer US bonds as well as stocks not because returns on them as such are always highest, but because they are perceived as the best risk-adjusted choice. At the same time, the main source of the rise in foreign-owned assets in the US in 1998 was not an increase in net new holdings, but rather price increases in the value of foreign-held American assets relative to the prices of American-held foreign assets.

Overseas savings in US financial markets have in turn increased total demand for US securities and thus, all else being equal, their price. The effect here has primarily been indirect, since the share of foreign ownership in total American stock market capitalization has held fairly constant throughout the 1990s, at around 8 percent. But, as Jane D'Arista argues, because increased foreign purchases of US bonds have pushed their prices up and yields down, they have encouraged domestic investors to switch into stocks. 'US equity markets could not have risen so far so fast without the benefit of substitution effects from large capital inflows.'³²

5. Adept Federal Reserve policy. The Federal Reserve has been praised for allowing unemployment to fall well below the level that NAIRU hawks had said was prudent. But, as we have seen, Greenspan understood that job insecurity would inhibit American workers from pressing for wage demands even in tight labour markets, as they had done in the past. His real achievement during the Clinton presidency has lain elsewhere—in holding a balance between the need to keep financial markets liquid enough to sustain the stock market, and to keep interest rates high enough to ensure a continued flow of

³¹ See Jane D'Arista, 'International Capital Flows and the US Capital Account', *Capital Flows Monitor*, 6 December 1999.

³² 'International Capital Flows', p. 2.

foreign savings into the US. Greenspan has certainly managed this well, even as the countervailing market pressures have mounted. Furthermore, had Greenspan and Rubin not conducted successful bail-out operations when the sequence of Mexican, East Asian and Long-Term Capital Management crises broke out, the US stock market would probably have dived as the cumulative effects of these shocks coursed through global financial markets.³³ By a 'successful' bail-out, I mean an operation that not only prevented an interactive debt deflation, but also protected the wealth of US investors—since substantial losses would almost certainly have burst the US bubble.

CONCLUSION

How does the record of Clintonomics sum up? It should be clear that even by the lax standards of European ideologues friendly to Clinton, the claim that his Administration has pioneered a 'Third Way' which renews the best traditions of social liberalism is risible. This is not to say that Clinton's policies have been indistinguishable from those of Bush or Reagan. The general requirement of product differentiation in an electoral market means that at the margin any Democratic President will offer more social concessions than a Republican opponent of the same cohort. A political system with a spectrum of opinion so narrow it deters half the electorate from voting depends on the persistence of a faint distinction between the two parties for its legitimacy. But it is the system, not its components, that tracks changes in direction of policy. Viewed historically, as the centre of gravity of the system has shifted steadily to the right over the past generation, a Republican incumbent of one period can easily be less reactionary than a Democrat in the next, as we have repeatedly seen from the data—Nixon presiding over higher wages and less poverty than Clinton. These structural coordinates set the parameters of American politics. But they do not absolve Presidents from responsibility for their time in office. As Clinton's incumbency

³³ In saying 'probably', as opposed to 'certainly', I am acknowledging the countervailing possibility that worsening conditions in overseas markets might have driven foreign investment in the US upwards. But it is still difficult to imagine that a full-scale bankruptcy of Long-Term Capital Management would not have burst the bubble of 'irrational exuberance' in America.

draws to a close, there has been a sustained effort by liberal media to burnish his tarnished credentials as a leader, with solemn eulogies of his record in office. The reality is far from these rosy images. The core of Clinton's programme has been global economic integration, with minimum interventions to promote equity in labour markets or stability in financial markets. Gestures to the least well-off have been slight and back-handed, while wages for the majority have either stagnated or declined. Wealth at the top, meanwhile, has exploded. But a stratospheric rise in stock prices and debt-financed consumption spree make a mortgaged legacy. Clinton will hand over to his successor the most precarious financial pyramid of the post-war epoch.

GEORGI DERLUGUIAN

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

LIKE ANY SAGA, this story has a long pre-history which begins—naturally—in Mozambique. To afford the down-payment for a house in Chicago, I first had to sell my four-room apartment in Moscow. That fabulous dwelling was in every sense dearly earned. Though we never had a chance to live in it. So this is:

Part One—My Moscow Apartment

Admittedly, while in Africa, we were paid rather lavishly. As much as fifteen to twenty times the average wage in the USSR. Returning to Moscow in 1985, I discovered that life continued to be eerily normal there. After Tete it took us months to feel comfortable sleeping on sheets in a bed, without a gun, or being able to drink tap water. Every gloomy Moscow morning I would take the same crowded Metro to the university where the familiar cloakroom babushki would not even notice that I'd been away for a year. 'Were you sick?' they would ask compassionately, taking my parka and fur hat. 'I didn't see you last week.' Meantime I had become an unusually wealthy student. I could buy the most expensive available car (Volga-31) with cash, and there would still remain plenty to buy presents for all the relatives. But why get a car? I still lived in the university dorm, four guys in a room. Instead, we ate delicacies by crateloads. Moscow was supplied exceptionally well compared to the rest of the country. We could indulge in Soviet Gargantuanism: Czech beer, Hungarian ducklings, Romanian salami, Bulgarian fruits, Yugoslav patés, Finnish cheeses, Cypriot juices, Iraqi dates, Algerian red wines, Cuban cigars, Portuguese sardines, olives or port.

I had lived in the dorms of Moscow State University for five years, since I was sixteen. It was a world of our own. But we were about to graduate and leave. (Five years later several dorm-mates emerged as leading lights of post-Soviet politics, as either warlords in places like Tajikistan, Karabagh, Ingushetia or Transdnistria, or as more peaceful parliamentarians; or even in more distant lands like Eritrea, Palestine and Lebanon). After the chronic overcrowding of the dorms, the idea that I could afford a whole co-op apartment of my own seemed ever more dazzling as the day of graduation approached. But, as I was immediately told by a friendly-looking lady at the Bank for Foreign Trade, I really couldn't buy an apartment because I didn't have a residence permit for Moscow.

In the usual Soviet fashion, I tried several ways round this stupid rule, until I ran into a particularly irritable old man at the Public Reception Desk of Moscow City Soviet. He looked rather like one of the moving skeletons in Steven Spielberg's films. Dressed in a worn double-breasted suit in the fashion of the 1930s, with a tiny red-gilded pin in the lapel, he stood up and, shaking slightly, cried in a high-pitched voice: 'Comrade—or shall I say Mister?—Derlug'yan, there are probably many rich men like you in Moscow, but if we allow all of them to buy mansions on Gorky Street, what will become of our socialist values?' As I was about to leave, he hissed: 'You know, back in 1938 I used to shoot your ilk.' Well, I was suffering from my own veterans' syndrome. Standing in the door, I retorted that it wasn't certain who would have shot whom first and whose pleasure would be greater . . . He promised to report me to the appropriate authorities.

All available legal channels were now exhausted, and I had no access to extra-legal capabilities. At this point, as scientists say, a miracle occurred. Which was always an integral part of Russian reality. For when I went back to Mozambique a year later, I was assigned as interpreter to an inconspicuous individual with the common name of Voronenko. He had come to teach a month-long course in urban planning and earn his own legally sanctioned hard-currency roubles. Yet he wasn't as blindly interested in Japanese electronic wares as most other Soviet aid workers. Voronenko, rather, developed a collector's passion for Makonde ebony sculpture. When he discovered that, beyond fluency in Portuguese, I had a degree in African studies, our professional relationship grew into

days of leisurely conversation under a mango tree about the history of Mozambique, African mythology and everything else in the world. Eventually talk turned to the inevitable question of the little fortune waiting for me in the Bank for Foreign Trade.

So far its main effect had just been to fatten me up after the year of starvation in Upper Zambezi, when I got back weighing 120 pounds. It had also impressed my mother into taking me more seriously. For several years she felt ashamed to tell anyone in our town that I was studying in Moscow a language called Hausa (she would pronounce it 'chaosa'). Being quite a resolute woman from a Cossack stanitsa near Gorbachev's, she came to Moscow when I was in my sophomore year and tried to bribe the entire Dean's office to have me transferred home or expelled outright. She always wanted me to become something practical, a Party secretary or a gynaecologist. So when I returned after the first stint in Mozambique, I requested that my last half-monthly pay be issued in cash. It came to 1,813 special roubles that could be used for purchases at hard-currency stores (they fetched twice the number of the normal roubles on the black market). By way of comparison, my father earned 250 internal roubles a month as a factory manager, and my mother's disability pension was 58 a month. For increased propagandistic effect, I asked for the sum to be given me in smaller bills, which resulted in several neat fat packs in bank wrappers that I stacked in every one of the many exotic pockets of my Portuguese commando camouflage pants. In mitigation, I had barely turned twenty-three and wasn't even a graduate. The ploy worked. When my mom saw me pulling the bundles of cash from every imaginable recess of the uniform, for the first time ever she admitted that probably I had a reason for not becoming a gynaecologist. She still complained bitterly that I came back too skinny.

In Tete I told Voronenko about the talking cadaver I had run into at the Moscow City Soviet. He nodded understandingly, wrote his phone number on a cigarette pack and told me to call him when I got back to Moscow. During the next seven months or so I occasionally wondered who he might be. Although he taught a modest course in planning, wore sandals and shorts, could readily sit in the red dust with the African wood carvers, and wove baskets as his hobby, there were times when I couldn't help detecting markers of a powerful courtier in the way he listened and conducted conversations, or when I observed how willingly he was served by the normally frosty diplomats from the embassy. The

very fact that he could develop a serious amateur interest in African art and mythology matched what I had learnt about the dispositions of near-the-top nomenklatura.

In Comrade Voronenko's office

So, back in Moscow again, one evening I called his number. His wife recognized my name: 'Oh, you must be the Africanist student from Mozambique, aren't you? Do call him at the office.' It was almost ten in the evening, and he was still at his desk: another sign of a high-rank functionary. The secretary who took the call was not at all the type favoured by the high-ups in the Young Communist League or, later, by Nouveaux Russian bankers: the chirping sexy coquette. Sounding rather like a heavily built schoolmistress, she asked me stolidly: 'One moment, please. How should I report your organizational affiliation?' At that I was caught unprepared, and could only reply: 'My affiliation? The Institute of World History, Academy of Sciences.' I seemed to catch a faint snort. A moment later she switched back to me again and said, with only a very slight hint of surprise: 'Comrade Voronenko will see you tomorrow at 11:40. Your pass will be ordered for Entrance Number Two.' I now regained enough composure to ask: 'Excuse me, could you kindly explain where is Entrance Number Two and, incidentally, what is Comrade Voronenko's position?' Her jaw plainly dropped. After a second, she yelled at me: 'Young man! The Head of the Apparat of the Moscow City Soviet offers you an extraordinary appointment during his personal time tomorrow morning, and you are trying to tell me that you don't know with whom you are scheduling a meeting?'

The rest was easy. The building in which the Moscow City Soviet was housed was a typical nineteenth-century governor-general's palace, which had been expanded in Stalin's time till it came to look like a Constructivist factory box with neo-classical columns in front. (It would be rebuilt again in the 1990s with the appropriate addition of a glimmering shopping-mall tower of tinted glass atop everything else.) Inside, the mysterious place consisted of endless red-carpeted corridors and very tall, tightly shut identical doors. Serious men in grey suits with thick briefcases on their knees were patiently waiting in Voronenko's anteroom. They glanced with curiosity at my bearded appearance. The secretary (apparently another one) showed me into a huge office with predictably monumental Stalinist furniture, heavy dark-red drapes on

the windows, and an assortment of different size and colour telephones on a special stand at the left of the redwood desk. We sat down in deep leather armchairs in the corner and for half-an-hour chatted about Mozambique and basket-weaving. I didn't remind him of my problems. At the end of the conversation, seeing me to the door, he simply suggested that I should mail him a formal complaint: 'As an elected deputy of the City Soviet I have a duty to react to people's complaints about soulless bureaucrats, don't I?'

By this time I was married. Liuba's mother was both a veteran of Stalingrad and a mistress of complaints. She sat down at the kitchen table, sent us out, and wrote in a school notebook the whole story of German tanks halted in 1942 a few yards from their ruined house, of rafting wounded soldiers and munitions across the Volga amidst the burning oil, then living for twelve years after the war in old trenches, barracks and railroad cars until she could get her prized, tiny Khrushchvka apartment in 1958. A powerful document it must have been, but my mother-in-law wouldn't let us read it. Then I wrote my own short and, I hoped, legally astute explanation of the case and sent off the package.

A week later a cheerfully accomodating young man called to say that the 'question' was 'considered' and, given the circumstances of my 'honourable internationalist duty' and 'special need for home study to further social scientific research', it was 'resolved favourably'. I was all set. No, there was no need to come to any office. They would gladly do everything themselves. I was placed second in the waiting list for four-room apartments in the whole city of Moscow. I only needed to transfer the necessary sum into the account of a construction company and go there to indicate whether I agreed to the location of my future residence.

At the office of the construction company that specialized in building for hard-currency deposits, there sat next to me in the line an elderly Jew who, when he saw me reading a Portugese newspaper, inquired in a distinctly Castilian accent whether I wouldn't mind practising some Spanish with him while we were waiting. After graduating from a Minsk high school in 1937, he had been picked as a languages-capable volunteer for the NKVD special forces, and put through a crash course in Spanish, parachute jumps and demolition. But by the time he reached the Pyrenees the Spanish Republic had already fallen. With great difficulty, eluding the French police and Nazi secret services, he made it back

across Europe to the USSR and was promptly imprisoned as a Gestapo suspect, because so many others didn't return.

I knew such stories. Once, when I was a teenager, I discovered with no little astonishment an old picture of my father's uncle Leo dressed in the black uniform of an SS officer. They almost never spoke about the past in our family. Too many tragedies. Great-uncle Leo, as I learnt from him later, was dropped in Poland in June 1941. It took him three months of walking with his radio operator through the woods to catch up with the retreating Red Army. Somewhere around Brest-Litowsk they ambushed and strangled an SS motorcycle patrol with their belts. Then they opened the barn where the SS Sonderkommand kept those slated for execution. Uncle Leo liked to recall the triumphant moment when, dressed in full German uniform, he released the people inside, most of them very young, and told them in his beginner's Yiddish and Polish to hide in the forest. Then he drove into the village and asked for food. He was still wearing the remains of the SS uniform when he reached the Soviet lines—actually, a drunken Red Army officer peeing into the river as uncle Leo was swimming across—and narrowly escaped being executed on the spot as a German spy. In 1945 he met in Berlin the same officer who once had nearly shot him, and they got royally drunk together. Many years later he learnt there was a small monument at a rural cemetery in Poland erected to villagers killed by the SS. The plaque mentioned two unknown Soviet soldiers.

We practised Spanish for a while, then my companion told me sadly that his grandson had emigrated and become a successful businessman in Israel. He had sent his grandfather the money to buy a car and an apartment in Moscow, because the old man refused to leave for Israel: 'Of course, it is right to build a Motherland for the long-suffering Jewish people, but why at the service of the most aggressive circles of American imperialism? Why couldn't it be a peaceful Soviet republic?'

The construction site turned out to be on Academician Korolev Street, next to the eighteenth-century summer palace and park of Count Sheremetiev, across the pond from the Ostankino TV tower. A glamorous location indeed. On 3 October 1993, when the nationalist and neo-Communist rebels against Yeltsin tried to seize the TV centre, all the windows were blown out in the neighbouring houses. But this would happen later, and we never got an apartment there anyway. Meanwhile

time passed. Gorbachev fell. The Soviet Union disappeared. I don't know where my benefactor Voronenko is now. For a couple of years I avoided thinking about what happened to my precious account at the Soviet Bank for Foreign Trade—found plundered and empty, according to press reports, after the August 1991 coup. Which is not entirely unbelievable, I must admit. Banks rarely survive revolutionary upheavals. By now, in another odd miracle, we lived with two kids in Binghamton NY and were desperately poor for a change. As far as the common consequences of revolutions go, we had no reason to complain.

But behind all the spectacular transformations in Moscow, bureaucratic wheels kept on revolving at their own stately pace. In late 1993 a man called my mother-in-law from an ostensibly bankrupt and defunct Soviet hard-currency firm romantically called 'Beriozka-Uslugi' (the Birch Tree Services). He briskly demanded the deposit of an additional three million roubles for 'appreciation of building materials due to hyperinflation'. I did not follow the Russian inflation and had no idea how much this could be. Several thousand dollars, as it turned out, which we couldn't find anyway—we were subsisting on a stipend of \$7,800 a year. Without telling us anything, my dad called on neighbours, relatives and friends in Krasnodar (networking is dense in a southern provincial town) with a notebook in hand and borrowed the necessary sum, in cash, from all who could contribute. Of course, at no interest and without any formal guarantees except the good family name. My mother then made him a secure body pouch, dressed him warm for the Moscow winter, and sent him a thousand miles north by train through the newly established customs of independent Ukraine.

I visit my new apartment

Everything went fine until the last minute. The money was paid, the title and keys were issued, though the apartment turned out to be not as centrally located as we hoped, but at least it was decently built. Despite minor cracks and the standard awful plumbing, one could live in it right away. At the end of a long day, dad grew so cold and tired of Moscow that he lost his bearings. But he still felt entrepreneurial and capitalist, according to the new spirit of the times. In his view the apartment must now pay for itself, so he rented it to the first willing 'businessman' he saw. The guy was in his early twenties, just out of military service, selling chocolates, beer and vodka from a steel-reinforced box near the Metro

entrance. He practically lived in the kiosk and had a sign, 'Will rent for good dollars', in his shop window.

The young businessman, of course, never paid the rent. He lived on borrowed money himself, hoping to strike it rich soon. Instead he had to hide from creditors who had hired the mob, or were the mob. For that reason he wouldn't let me in when I came to Moscow the following June. Naturally, after all these adventures, I wanted to see my apartment of the fabulous 101.2 square meters. I made several long trips to the windswept construction site where it was located at Zhulebino, just outside the Moscow beltway, which resembled a huge haphazard pile of blue-and-white children's Lego blocks left in the middle of tangled rail tracks and former potato fields. All just to stare at my own locked door and hear muzzled noises behind it.

Facing an impasse, I decided at least to get acquainted with my new neighbours. The first door opened even before I rang the bell. The woman inside was watching me through the judas-window all along. She was in her mid-forties, dressed in a slightly torn dressing-gown, and terribly talkative. Dragging me into her kitchen amidst the flow of words, she plied me with a bottle of Bulgarian brandy, pickled cucumber and the remains of a pie. Then she demanded to know whether I really worked in America. Her husband, in pyjamas and slippers, sat glumly in the corner reading *Zavtra*, the leading Russian chauvinist newspaper, pretending he was deaf. I glimpsed the uniform of an Air Force Colonel on a hanger in the corridor. Natalya Ivanovna told me first of all not to pay attention to her husband: 'Ah, let him brood. Ivan is nearing retirement, and military pensions are no longer what they used to be. Dear Georgii Matveevich, if only you knew how impoverished Mother Russia has become because of these macro-econo-mists! Life is so hard—no prospects for young people. Take my daughter, 19 years old, and I can say without boasting, quite pretty, if you know what I mean? We shall soon need a husband for her, preferably an American, of course. When I was her age, we girls loved cadets. But that was back then. Today, life has changed, who would need someone like my Ivan? Please, I beg you as a mother, get me a nice American boy. What would it cost you? We shall take care of the rest.'

The other neighbour's door was a steel slab worthy of a bomb shelter, only without the locking wheel. After some introducing and negotiat-

ing through this iron wall, I was invited in for tea. Saccharine music from Indian movies filled the flat. My host wore a counterfeit Adidas jogging suit, was of very dark complexion and densely unshaven. Grinning widely and showing many golden teeth, he said with an Azeri accent as thick and sweet as Turkish delight: 'I see you are this Armenian guy, so I want to tell you from the beginning, this Karabagh-marabagh war-shmore doesn't concern me at all! I am a peaceful baker-maker of Caucasian chureks, and my wife is a Russian from the Ivanovo cotton mill. I don't deal with politics!' Ali, of course, was an Azerbaijani trader from a remote mountain village in the Zakatal district, fabled for its walnuts. He gave me a lot of tea with halva and confided that my tenant was a dangerous man. Very young, reckless and with bad company visiting him all the time. Behind the fake leather on my door he had installed bullet-proof armour plates (actually, from both sides, as I later discovered) and kept a big dog. Very dangerous! It sounded like my tenant was rather in danger himself.

My university classmates began calling to offer their help. Mostly they were former history and philosophy students who had once belonged to our Caucasian circle in the dorm: an informal community united by sheer nostalgia, Georgian home-made wines, Armenian cognacs, Azerbaijani caviar, and all other foods and fruits sent from our homes. For a moment, I entertained the vision of a splendid scene worthy of a Soviet-era ethnic comedy—an Armenian in Moscow comes to evict a Russian tenant with a grim-looking band consisting of a Chechen, two Azeris, a Tatar who grew up in an orphanage in rural Georgia, and a Yezid (Yezids speak a Kurdish dialect and belong to the vestiges of a mystical sect of Manichean origin, which is why ignorant people consider them devil-worshippers). Most of this crowd had doctoral degrees; Yusup, for example, the Tatar from Georgia, was our best specialist on Luxemburg and Gramsci. Nonetheless to many Russians we often looked menacing, and I admit we sometimes exploited this perception for student pranks. A raid by this bunch could have been a nice show of regional internationalism, but I managed to resolve the matter less dramatically and with the surprisingly courteous help of the local police precinct where I had originally gone to stamp my passport.

The Major on duty inquired if I would rent the place to a trustworthy person whom he would personally recommend; a well-to-do banker, by the way. I gladly obliged, he asked me to fill a form, called a locksmith—

and within an hour I finally saw my apartment from inside. It was the usual Soviet high-rise apartment, only it was unusually large. The drab wallpaper was shabbily glued right over the bare concrete, the bathroom was painted in colours normally reserved for basements, and electrical cables protruded from a few outlets, but who would expect anything else? The policeman's reliable banker turned out to be a tattooed thug with a pocketful of hundred-dollar bills and a TT pistol showing when he scratched his armpit. I jokingly remarked that when we were being trained, they told us to avoid pistols in general, and bulky TTs in particular. He wasn't too credulous, but still curious: 'And what did they advise you to wear in this school of yours?' Frankly scared by my newest tenant, but trying to impress him with macho professional patter, I replied: 'They told us to avoid trouble in the first place, but otherwise to carry a couple of hand grenades. Pistols create a false sense of being armed. Grenades are much louder, more fearsome, versatile and reliable.' A prophetic comment, in hindsight. Two months later he disappeared, reported killed. Soon afterwards I convinced my relatives that the apartment had better be sold.

I visit the Privatization Office

Selling the place was only slightly less exotic than acquiring or renting it. For instance, at one point I took a flight from Washington to Moscow only to learn that the prospective purchaser was not a woman called Natasha but her husband, who happened to be the elder son of an African sheikh from Timbuktu. Timbuktu! The real world is more romantic than dreamers suspect. But the old sheikh was ill, his son had filial duties in Mali and so could not be counted on to return any time soon. Eventually, however, we found our buyer—a builder with connexions to Moscow's all-powerful Mayor and thus the \$75,000 that was the going price for an apartment of this size and location. We were lucky. Eight months later the rouble would be devalued four-fold.

The buyer left no precaution unattended. The sale had to be secured from every legal and extra-legal side. From the outset he vaguely but insistently alluded to his mob connexions in case I cheated. To maintain reciprocity, I hinted at links to the KGB. More practically, he demanded I produce every imaginable piece of documentation to prove that I had the exclusive legal title to the property, including a recently dated psychiatric

affidavit of my mental capacity to sign legally binding documents. This started another bureaucratic odyssey.

First, in the bitter December cold, I wandered about looking for the District Privatization Office, where I was supposed to get something called the Updated Release Form Number Six. After nearly an hour of searching around the neighbourhood, I finally realized that the address I had been given belonged to the building which a couple of workers were demolishing at a leisurely pace with sledgehammers. 'Privatizatsiya has moved, its building was privatized and it will become a casino now,' they explained to me. Eventually I found, in quite another corner of the city, the actual Privatization Office. Visitors were required to put down their names on lists hanging outside the reception window.

Last on the list was a name that struck me like a bolt of lightning: Milorad Bozhevich Savich! Error was impossible—no two men in Moscow could possess this combination of Montenegrin names. In fact, every year the same practical joke was played on naive first-year girls, who would be incited by older classmates to approach the old monster with the question: 'Milorad Bozhevich, may I ask you, is your name Serbian or Croatian?' To which he would roll his huge eyes and roar: 'Chernogorskel' (Montenegrin). Dreadful yet adored, Professor Savich had taught Marxist-Leninist philosophy to generations of graduates at the Soviet Academy of Sciences ever since Khrushchev's reconciliation with Tito in the mid-fifties had put him out of active politics. He had led an eventful life. From a prominent Montenegrin family, he received a good classical education at Cetinje Gymnasium; fought as a partisan during the War; in 1945 came to Moscow to study at the Tank and Armour Academy—puzzling given his gigantic proportions (Montenegrians are the tallest population in Europe, and he was about six foot six high. During philosophy seminars we often quietly wondered how this figure could ever have fitted into a tank; but he had a voice capable of outshouting its engine). He would mention sometimes that he was twice imprisoned in Hungary and survived a show trial in Rumania. He ridiculed Tito at every opportunity ('Just look at this theoretical innovator! His latest achievement is to proclaim Islam a nationality in Bosnia-Herzegovina. What an Aristotle!') and dropped phrases like: 'Ah, the philosophy of Dyordyi Lukach, I knew it like my pocket. I criticized him . . .' Nonetheless, we loved Savich not only because he was such a striking personage. Though strongly opinionated, he was fair, surpris-

ingly irreverent towards Communist dogmatics, and truly steeped in philosophy. I looked around the line. No sign of Milorad Bozhevich. Had Savich been present, he would certainly have been visible, or immediately audible. I knocked at the window: 'Young Lady, please, where is the gentleman whose odd name stands just above mine in the list?' He is dead, was the reply. 'It's an inheritance case.'

A woman at the local ID desk, where I went to renew my passport, was mostly preoccupied with watering her numerous plants—the office looked like a seriously run greenhouse. Peering into my file, she looked at me again and said, tenderly: 'Why do you say that you work at some university in the USA?'—'It's not considered a crime anymore, is it?' I answered. 'God forbid! Work wherever you like, if they will take you. The problem is how are you going to substantiate this information? Do those American universities issue you Work Book Form Number 68?'—'No, but trust me, they issue plenty of other forms.' 'Who cares? I can only tell you that with this entry you'll have lots of headaches down the line. So why don't we erase it and write simply, "Temporarily unemployed"?' No job—no papers—no problems.

Next, in a freezing District Military Commissariat, I had to obtain my re-registration slip. A tired-looking Lieutenant-Colonel, with a woollen sweater showing underneath his uniform, emerged with my papers in his hands and said: 'You realize that you are up for promotion? If you serve a month of re-training, you could become a Major.' He sighed. 'But I guess you probably won't.' Finally, at 6 pm on 25 December 1997, all the papers were in place, the buyer stood next to me, and we signed and notarized the deed of sale, having waited in line for five hours. That was the back-door line, where everyone who waited had already paid the bribe to skip the official line waiting in the front.

The next technicality was to extract the \$75,000 in new counterfeit-proof hundred-dollar bills (this sum fills almost an entire attaché case). Earlier that morning it had been deposited in a safe box at the bank, which is now a standard procedure. The deposit box was opened by the buyer in my name and in my presence, but he kept the key. The final act was to exchange the key for the signed deed of sale. And then—well, do something with the money. One doesn't keep it in a bank. The safe deposit was a refurbished nuclear bomb-shelter, adorned with faux gilded chandeliers and metal detector gates. The former Spetsnaz officers guarding

it, armed with machine-guns and garbed in bulletproof vests, did not allow more than three people at a time down there. The rest of the line had to stand outside in the street. It was an exquisite spectacle. A crowd of people clad in expensive furs and Turkish leather coats, milling about in the dirty snow and nervously hugging bags and briefcases with visibly bulging with piles of cash.

So we dashed in my brother-in-law's car through the winter night into the maze of downtown Moscow, looking behind us for potential pursuers. Nobody gave chase. Our scheduled hiding-place was in a friend's office, which happened to be located inside the headquarters of General Lebed's political campaign. Nothing exists in Russia without irony. Lebed's HQ occupied a wing of the Surikov Academy of Fine Arts, right across from the Tretyakov Gallery, and was patrolled by well-armed retired paratroop colonels. Student paintings hung in the corridor next to posters of Lebed. Personally—no doubt a sign of perverted taste—I was more taken by the posters. A typical placard showed the General in fatigues, on one knee in a firing position, a grenade-launcher on his shoulder, above a caption reading: 'THE GENERAL WHO STOPPED TWO WARS' (in Moldova and Chechnya, apparently).

But, as the economists say, my apartment had been converted into liquidity, like so many other former Soviet assets, and could now be dispatched on an inevitably crooked transborder route. Trusting only friends, or friends of friends, we brought it safely to Chicago. Here begins:

Part Two—The House in Illinois

It soon became painfully obvious that our little fortune was far too small to buy anything in the greater Chicago area within the reach of Northwestern campus. After a depressing housing search, Liuba found a tiny run-down brick bungalow whose owner wanted \$220,000. It looked very over-priced. We made a first tentative offer, and received the straightforward reply that the owner regarded it as an insult.

Living within the Chicago city limits meant being stuck with one of the most dreadful school systems in America, or finding the money for private school. By far the best and the safest school district was in Wilmette, a tidy green suburb (the ratio of concrete to vegetation is in general a reliable indicator of social status in Chicagoland) within a bicycle ride

to campus. Needless to say, the combination of safety, good schools, well-maintained vegetation and infrastructure are markers of a white upper-middle class fleeing the city. By the end of first week at school my younger son, getting off the yellow schoolbus, asked me why he was so brownish. I looked at the noisy crowd of Nordic-looking children, and said: 'Next time tell them that in the whole school you are the only real Caucasian born in the Caucasus.'

A week later I was bicycling down Wilmette Avenue when I saw a smartly dressed lady, in silks and many jewels, obviously a realtor, struggling to mallet down a FOR SALE sign into a front lawn. Politely offering to help her, I looked up at the house—it was a typical yellow-brick Chicago bungalow, much bigger than the one we'd tried to get—and said: 'I wish I could buy this place.' She looked at me and said: 'You must be an East European, because you all like brick. You know what? You might be able to afford it—take a look.' Well, inside the house looked as depressing as it gets in the American lower middle-class dream dwellings of the fifties. Faded pink wallpaper, carpets of that gooey greenish-yellow colour that Russians call 'little baby's unexpectedness', brownish cracked linoleum, clumsy doors, small windows painted over and over again during the past decades. The house had everything one might imagine—a dusty crucifix with plastic roses on one wall, a faded fishing trophy on the other, a bronze plate of the Iwo Jima monument, a framed photo of a boy in a Marine's uniform sitting in front of his bride, an over-permed false blonde with a Hollywood smile. Outside there was a decrepit two-car garage in which sat a boat-like 1981 Oldsmobile station-wagon, plastered with the bumper-stickers 'Be American, Buy American' and 'Semper Fi'. There was a gypsum statue of St. Francis preaching to doves in the backyard, and in the front an industrial-size flagpole lit by a powerful timed beam at night. The air reeked of stale cigarette smoke and cheap beer.

In short, the owners belonged to that god-fearing and country-loving population, the American working class. Descendants of German Catholic immigrants from Trier, they had changed their name during the First World War from Schneider to Snyder. The house was built by Mrs Snyder's father in 1928. In 1945 her brother returned from the Second World War with a bride, and they added several cardboard and plywood partitions in the attic, described as 'two bedrooms upstairs'. The half-century-old makeshift cubicles now looked no more cheerful

than Soviet *kommunalki* (the pre-revolutionary bourgeois apartments divided up to squeeze in a dozen Soviet families). So despite a stream of visitors on Open House Sunday, we ended up being the only bidders. We got it for a mere \$229,000. Mrs Snyder conceded one thousand for roof repairs. I convinced Liuba we should stay in our rented apartment for another month and do some fixing before moving into the house. That's how it all started.

The simplest re-roofing, according to the eager real-estate agents, would cost just \$5,000. With additional vents—'highly advisable'—it might reach \$9,000. Well, I said, why meddle with the old one, when we can build a new mansard roof that would increase the living space almost two-fold? I sat at the computer and did some calculations. Theoretically, it looked thrilling. But I couldn't do it myself.

At first we proceeded the usual American way, by looking at Yellow Pages and asking the realtor for references. The first contractor to appear was Polish, obviously of farmer stock, a smelly boar-like *bydło*. He asked how much money I had, laughed, and advised me to build an outhouse with that ridiculous amount.

We get to know Gideon

So then we phoned round the ex-Soviet community. Three stylishly dressed young Lithuanians turned up. They behaved in a very professional manner and apologized every time one of them, a huge blonde kid called Sigitas, swore in Russian. (I learned later that he proudly wore a black karate belt and had nearly enlisted in the French Foreign Legion.) I knew they were our men when the eldest member of the trio, 26-year-old Egidijus, frankly admitted that they had never built a real house, but would do their best to try for the money that I could offer. Egidijus, or Gideon in English, was one of the outcomes of Lithuania's independence. In 1990 he graduated from high school to realize that Soviet-era subsidies had ended and he could no longer afford to study at the Vilnius Architectural Institute. So he made his way to the US and stayed illegally, creating his own job—a company called Europe Style, Inc. He was a stereotypical Balt—blond, brooding, and terribly thorough. Like most Lithuanians, he treated Polish competitors with condescending irony. All three wore impeccable white pants and T-shirts with the Europe Style logo to stress that they were not dirty Polish contractors.

Working with Gideon had its own charm. One day we were spreading the felt underlining for the shingles of the rooftop. Gideon politely suggested that I might redo a layer, because it deviated almost an inch over the twenty-foot length. He pointed to the roof of a nearby yuppie castle (a brand-new mansion of faux brick with phony towers and a heated driveway): 'See their roof? To impress buyers they used cedar and copper, as expensive as it gets, but their layers deviate by at least six inches between the ends of the roof, so the valleys don't join up. Can't you see what a sloppy job it is?' Honestly, I couldn't see anything terribly wrong with it. But I had to accept that I would not be allowed to put a single layer on my own roof without levelling it in at least five points. When I asked where he learned the secrets of laying shingles, Gideon replied that he had read books and watched a video of roofing techniques throughout the night before. Mine came to be a very sturdy roof, as the recent hurricane proved.

I became Gideon's apprentice by accident and only incrementally. First, we needed to demolish the old roof, and for a week, as I thought, someone had to be carrying the debris to a dumpster. Well, I economized a little. Ordering a dumpster is very expensive. Instead, I cut the old lumber with an electric saw and stockpiled it for firewood behind the garage. It came to be quite a pile. We still have plenty for roasting shish-kebabs. Then we discovered that someone who could speak English would have to be continuously present at the site to negotiate with the police, the firemen and the building inspectors. Like many East Europeans, I had naively believed that private property was sacred under capitalism. Well, that's a normative ideological claim, as I now realize. From talking to the policeman and astronaut-like firefighter in full attire, I learnt that burning construction debris is a crime, but cooking on an open fire, even though in a savagely exotic brick pit, is not. So I kept on generously burning scrap lumber and feeding the team, always with culinary equipment to hand—in proud accordance with Fernand Braudel's description of Armenian merchants in the 17th century: 'stubborn, sober, hardy and enterprising mountaineers.'

Then it turned out that you cannot touch what is supposedly your own house without written and very costly permission from the Wilmette Village Authority. Back in the USSR, apartments ostensibly belonged to the socialist state, but the state was so busy with its own concerns (watching the ideological allegiances of its subjects, etc.) that there was

almost complete freedom to do whatever one liked with public housing. My neighbour Natalia Ivanovna in Moscow had ordered her Colonel husband to cut a hole into the elevator shaft to fit the back of their refrigerator and the dryer's exhaust pipe. This way they spared a couple of square metres of their corridor and filled the building elevator with the smells of drying laundry. Not so in the USA, where one cannot replace even kitchen cabinets without a formal permit, because they are attached to the walls and thus legally become part of the building-frame. Then, of course, there are all the plumbing regulations that guarantee a monopoly to the local craftsmen, offering one a good sense of what medieval guilds must have felt like.

I learn how to draw

On the third day of our grand demolition, a couple of village bureaucrats and a policeman drove into my yard and sealed the premises with red plastic tape. I spent the next two weeks trying to get the permits for demolition, dumpster, and then general construction. Experience soon showed that, as in Russia, most American bureaucrats are in principle nice people with very boring routine jobs. They first of all wanted to see my architect and the blueprints. Of course, I had none. I sat at the computer and started to learn how to draw. Gideon found a sad-looking man called Iosif who had just arrived from the Ukraine, where he had been the Chief Architect at the Donetsk Coal Combine. He knew how to build a factory but had long since forgotten how to draw. His main rule was quintessentially Soviet: if the manual says use the pine beam number 10, always go with number 12 or 14, or better yet make it steel. The lumber may turn out to be sub-standard, the workers drunk—so always allow for excessive safety, because it's the architect who ends up going to prison. We spent several days in the Wilmette public library going through the American building codes. Obviously, Iosif didn't know English. Neither did I know the technical terms.

Then I bought the necessary supplies at Office Max and we spent a week together drawing the blueprints. My first trip to the Village Building Inspector nearly ended in disaster. He gazed at our efforts incredulously—'Sure, we used the metric scale'. With a heavy heart I asked him, before leaving: 'If you want everything in feet and inches, tell me at least how many inches there are in a bloody foot?' Astonished at such cheek, he said: 'Twelve. Twelve inches, and three feet to a yard.'

That week I was teaching the origins of Mesopotamian civilization. I shook my head and muttered: 'How Babylonian!' When he asked who the Babylonians were here, I replied with some asperity: 'Of course, not you, Sir. Your system of measurements', and briefly explained about the sexagesimal counting system of early civilizations, Hebrew fascination with numbers, and why we are stuck to this day with twelve-hour days and sixty minutes, rather than dividing the day into ten hours of a hundred minutes each. Behind him, the Village Data Processor (aka secretary) made big eyes and said: 'So, you ARE a real professor.' She became an invaluable ally, placing my blueprints and permit applications on the Electrical Inspector's chair—not the desk, where he could brush them aside, but rather the seat, where he could not avoid picking them up. Even the Building Inspector, sighing that he was not supposed to do so, would redraw my blueprints, with practical hints and types of materials he expected us to use.

We reduce our house to ruins

But we had to hurry up to make the house liveable. We did it in less than three months. It then took another five months or so to finish the decorative part of the job. For six weeks we nonetheless had to live like refugees on the floor in the basement, with four guests—an anthropologist from Krasnodar, his wife and two kids. Coming from Abkhazia, his wife had some experience of living in ruins, and her good humour saved us. For our appetite grew with every blueprint. If we are adding three bedrooms on the new second floor, there has to be a bathroom. Let's make it a little more spacious than usual. With a deep whirlpool bathtub. I had bought one from a dismantled show-room at a bargain price before we started, so it had to be fitted somewhere anyway. There must be a closet. In each room. Perhaps two large closets in the master bedroom. And three, no, better five skylights—here, here, and there.

A sliding patio door would be handy. It leads to a 10-foot-wide balcony, protruding five feet. No, we can make it six feet, up to the maple tree in the back. Sixty square feet should be enough for a summer tea-room under the tree. We end up with an empty space around the stairwell, in the middle of three bedrooms and a bathroom. Too many doors there. Let's create a visual distraction—maybe a six-feet-tall aquarium built into the corner? Then how do we support it? We sister the joists underneath with pine boards, and triple them under the projected fish-tank. The inspector suggests an additional column in the middle, to tie up the

trusses of the roof and prevent the ceiling from sagging later on. Fine: perhaps we can hang flowers from the column under the skylight overlooking the stairs? But one of the boys would be tempted to drop the flower pot on his brother's head as he climbs the stairs—that's too obvious a defensive position, overlooking the stairwell . . . And so went the hard labour of the mind.

The other major cause of extensive reconstruction was our mistakes. Most were due to lack of experience, while some should be blamed on easy access to sledgehammers. My sons (they are now ten and nine) could hold hammers and wielded them gleefully—you hit the wall, and it falls into pieces! Naturally, they soon made serious holes in the ground-floor walls, which we didn't originally plan to destroy. Then, with the old roof removed but a month before the new one arrived, it rained, with gusty wind and hail. Our hopes that a large tarpaulin would hold the water were literally dashed away. With the ceiling went the entire ground floor—so, what the heck! Another dumpster of rubble. The original bathroom was especially worthy of a sledgehammer. Five sticky layers of old linoleum over the rotten floor and tin tiles on the walls painted salad green. At one point, after I had gained some confidence in using the sledgehammer at full swing, the heavy cracked cast-iron tub flew up at me in sharp-pointed fragments.

In three weeks of hard labour we reduced our house to what I saw in Chechnya and Karabagh—just the exterior walls, as if a bomb had fallen and blown off the roof, windows, doors, leaving heaps of dusty rubble everywhere. At that point old Mrs Snyder came by and asked us to take pictures of it. I begged her forgiveness for having utterly destroyed the old home that she had so thoroughly tidied up before selling to us. 'Oh, no, not at all', she replied: 'I hated the house. Nothing good in my life ever happened while I lived there.'

But it was terribly hard to destroy. The plywood partitions would crack but not yield to the crowbar. The 8-inch bolts were inextricably held inside the plaster by steel spring 'butterflies'. Save for the concrete basement, studding, and the outside brick, the place inside was built amateurishly and frugally, without any frills. But very solidly: with just that excess of durability recommended by Iosif. It was riddled with an absurd amount of nails, screws and bolts. To enlarge the window openings, Gideon and I tried cutting the yellow silicate brick with a special

composite saw-blade. It burnt out in a couple of minutes, leaving only a groove on the surface—while we were blinded and choking with dust. Then I remembered that the ancients cut stone by pouring water over the saws. It was dangerous—our saw was electrical—but we thought of some protection, and eventually cut the windows larger. Inside they had used old newspapers for insulation, so taking a break between battering the windows and walls I would sit on a dusty pile of plaster, unroll the brittle pages and read the *Chicago Tribune* from September 1937 or July 1945. An archaeologist would have had no difficulty dating such ruins.

But the work was gratifying, I must admit. You rise before dawn to make use of every minute of daylight and work with what essentially are Lego blocks for grown-ups. Captivating, when it comes out right. Twelve hours later you only want a beer, a steak, and you fall soundly asleep. It is curious how tastes change with occupation. I really didn't want a bottle of red wine and cheese. Eventually I learnt basic carpentry techniques (but painting remained elusive—I was always bad with spreading gooey substances), and knew the rest at least in theory. I got used to wearing work-boots, pants and carpenter's belt. One day I saw from above two Black women (apparently not African-American, but almost certainly African), carefully examining my backyard. They turned out to be Jamaican, previously teachers and now housekeepers down the road. They asked me to cut them some spare boards. The older woman inquired who was the owner of the house. When I admitted to this status, she nodded: 'So you are a carpenter and you are building your own house. Good.' I explained that indeed, I was building it, but I was not really a carpenter, I actually worked at the local university. At this she scrutinized both my words and appearance and, after a pause, said: 'You mean you've never been a carpenter, but are a professor? Then what kind of accent do you have?' My confession that I was born in the Soviet Union had a surprising effect. Visibly moved, she turned to her shy companion, and said: 'Gloria, see, I told you many times. Under socialism men are totally different!' While I thought I had been overtaken by that typical petty-bourgeois philistine passion—self-exploitation . . .

Long live the home-builders' International

In fact, building a house near Chicago is a funny and informative guide to ethnic stereotypes. Our neighbour next door, Mrs Mueller, commended me for being as hard-working as an exemplary German. At the

lumber store two stocky carpenters, Assyrian by nationality and brothers in their fifties, once nearly fell to blows when I asked for their advice about various junctures in the balcony posts. One of them shouted at the other: 'Sarkis, shut up! I am older, and besides, what kind of shoddy advice are you giving to an Armenian brother? You disgrace all Assyrians this way!' Chicago has the largest concentration of Assyrians in the world today; there is even a King Sargon Street in the Devon area. But here all those who come from the former USSR—Armenians, Jews, Ukrainians, Lithuanians—are lumped together by locals in the same category: Russians. Ironically, the Soviet ambition of merging nationalities into a new supra-ethnic community has triumphed, at least for a generation or two, in the diaspora after the fall of the USSR itself. Which is not unusual of diaspora communities, I suppose.

In my experience the truly multinational, or internationalist, or colour-blind (whichever) melting pot is the sub-culture of home-builders on display in the chain of industrial warehouse stores that specialize in selling construction materials and equipment cheaply in the United States—Home Depot. Sometimes I used to make up to three trips there a day. Eventually you come to realize it is rather like a club. You end up knowing the entire personnel of the store, mostly former builders who have acquired green cards and opted for a stable job with fixed hours, and you recognize at least half the usual customers—all those small-time contractors and amateurs like yourself, who are trying to supplement their income with various degrees of ingenuity and self-exploitation.

Home Depot customers are predominantly lower-middle class, which is really the American working class. In large cities like Chicago this stratum is ethnically unbelievably diverse, yet it possesses a common class culture, if no politicized class consciousness. It is this culture that seems to override national, racial, even sexual divisions (yes, there are women there too), producing a sense of similar purpose and generalized solidarity, expressed in the ubiquitous friendly jokes, exchange of tips of the trade, advice where to buy better tools, or just readiness to help. Imagine a Ghanaian immigrant asking a Filipino and an Anglo to give him a hand in pulling down heavy batches of insulation from the upper shelves, a black American contractor advising a white American woman what door to choose, a Greek-American spending half-an-hour teaching me how to install a bathtub, a Latina woman at the cash register going way beyond the courtesy demanded by her job to help me

find a rental truck, a mischievously winking Arab helping two religiously dressed Jews push a heavy cart to the exit (I knew he was a Palestinian, but they probably didn't) and so on. This friendliness and readiness to share are certainly due in no small degree to the fact that this is a market place without acute competition. Amateurs are by definition not competitors with each other—they all have other jobs; while the contractors are too small and dispersed in a very large city to experience much face-to-face rivalry. (Although it's true my observations were made during a boom period in the business cycle.)

The construction trades themselves are divided into ethnically specialized sectors. That may also help to reduce competition. Such specialization appears to emerge more or less accidentally, and then become institutionalized for a while in the mechanisms of chain migration. For instance, practically all recent arrivals from Rumania are in carpeting and painting—taking a cue from those who came earlier. When I was looking for a heating engineer, I met three Soviet Jewish migrants from Minsk on the same day, all called Semyon. Contractors of Soviet origin congregate at a chosen restaurant in northern Chicago on Wednesday afternoons, rain or shine (weekends are for relaxation and these meetings are work). They drink heavily, trade information, and divvy-up their clients. Italians and Irish, as historically better established communities, cluster disproportionately in by far the best-paid plumbing jobs, where Jews are now joining them, while Poles mostly work illegally outside the union. Sikhs are in the mechanical occupations. White Americans and quite a few African-Americans enjoy the double benefit of citizenship and access to vocational training, often via military service. They go into managerial positions or crafts like tiling, masonry, or electrics. Conversely, former peasants from Central America are in landscaping—i.e. cutting grass and raking leaves—or roofing and other less skilled jobs, though often supervised by white Americans.

Relations of inequality do, of course, obtain, for the simple reason that those who came earlier feel entitled to better positions than new arrivals, who haven't yet experienced their fair share of suffering and humiliation. But it is a dynamic relationship, as everyone eventually becomes an old-timer and tiny new 'firms' branch out from older ones. Another reason for the relaxed or paternalistic spirit within and among construction teams, at least in the household sector, is that they normally lack formal mechanisms of labour discipline and rule enforcement.

Compliance is achieved by consensus and the authority of the current leader, who is under a constant obligation to prove his prowess, either by securing new jobs or working harder than anyone else. (This is actually how many guerrilla groups emerged in the early phases of the wars in Karabagh and Chechnya, out of previous experience in self-mobilization for construction works abroad. Perhaps the pattern was like this in Bosnia too, where so many men had been migrants to Germany.) This kind of social environment, emerging from an amateur/artisan milieu based on petty commodity production, or often even non-commodified household reproduction and mutual help, stands aside from the structures of capitalism, although in present-day America it is certainly penetrated by capitalist relations and institutions from above. What we have is a nice illustration of Braudel's notion that capitalism exists only at the highest levels of exchange, where profits are sufficiently massive and pressures of competition can to a significant extent be suppressed by the application of political or economic power.

The owners of Home Depot may be aware of such interactions, judging by the recent memoirs of its two founders. They should be credited with an innovative and systematic application of seemingly simple principles, which have allowed a gigantic corporation to grow in a short period over this non-capitalist productive milieu. To name just a few: deliberately keeping the stores looking like a busy and somewhat chaotic work-place, a warehouse or construction site, rather than a gleaming supermarket; hiring former contractors as salesmen and floor managers; allowing for almost unlimited returns of materials and tools that remain unused or proved inappropriate (the suggestion is 'Don't fear to try it, you can always return it'); reducing and hiding the presence of any bureaucratic management; bargaining over the price of left-over materials—tell us what you can afford, and we'll see if we can sell it to you. Lower rank managers can decide on prices in the frequent odd cases, just what was lacking in Soviet planning and the Soviet military. These are pretty standard managerial techniques for creating a loyal circle of customers and avoiding clogs in moving stocks through the store. But they are effective. This is how, for instance, I got my slightly chipped, oak front door at a third of the original price, along with advice about how to cover the cracks with copper, or the heavily discounted Spanish tiles for the bathroom and granite for the kitchen. The guy who helped me load the platform turned out to be a professional tile contractor. He spent a good part of his day coaching me in selecting tools, mortars and

tiling techniques, taking special pleasure in instructing a Russian. He was a former Marine who had served in Vietnam.

Here is something often overlooked about American society. The normative perception of Americans is the white middle class. It is very homogeneous, sanitized and one-dimensional, like McDonald's food. This stratum is indeed a thoroughly capitalist product—efficient, specialized, functional. The division of labour makes them one-dimensional (individuals, of course, vary, yet the tendency is certainly there). Human beings attached too closely to a specialized function tend to become boring cogs, even if they drive a Lexus. The upper-middle class in the US can afford not to know what's under the hood of their cars, how to finish floors, or where to improvise a vacation trip—they can hire a specialist for everything. The least-effort principle prescribes that if you can hire labour rather than learn a new skill, you just go ahead and think how to make some more money for another such occasion. What I describe above defies this depressing picture. There is a different America, perhaps many different ones; maybe there is even a non-capitalist America.

Well, our house is done. It is a bit on the sumptuous side—marbles, granite, Spanish tiles (Liuba laid them), stained oak doors and sills, cornices, skylights, balcony. I know pretty much every nail in it. It remains to replace the wooden cap over the front entrance (squirrels had babies in it, so it was spared for a while), and build the aquarium. More luxury had to be created to cover up our mistakes. I often parked the truck on the front lawn, and generally mistreated it in many other ways. The lawn perished, and Liuba replanted it with flower beds. We ended up looking quite different from the rest of the houses in the street, but soon flowers began appearing on other front lawns.

And, of course, the flag pole. It was quite an identity problem. The old Soviet flag? It was parsimonious and beautiful, but better not. The new/old Russian? No, unfortunately too Yeltsinite. The Kuban Cossack? I would gladly, if not for the brutes parading under it these days in my native town. A friend from Yerevan suggested the flag of Nagorno-Karabagh, so I could declare my property historic Armenian territory (we could easily find the appropriate facts in the history books) and thus stop paying taxes. But then we would have to learn to survive in a blockade, like Karabagh itself. The solution came, as in most political deadlocks, by

default. My younger son Stephan, as we discovered, had expropriated the old flag of Muscovy from a lamp post in the Kutuzov Prospekt in Moscow during the 850th anniversary of the city. He had kept it in the pocket of his backpack ever since. The flag is indeed lovely—a red field, and in the centre, the icon of dragon-slaying Sv. Georgii Pobedonosets, the Bearer of Victory. For aesthetic reasons, and by association of name, we ended by hoisting the flag of Muscovy.

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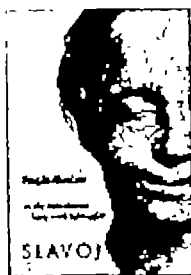


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DAVID MARQUAND

REVISITING THE BLAIR PARADOX

PETER MAIR HAS PUT all New Labour watchers in his debt. His contribution to the continuing debate on the 'Blair paradox' is illuminating and thought-provoking, and I have learned a lot from it.¹ In essence, he argues that the so-called paradox is not a paradox at all. In seeking to concentrate power within the Labour party while at the same time devolving power within the state, Blair and his associates are being perfectly consistent. Their aim is to eviscerate—or at least to by-pass—party altogether. The Prussian discipline they have imposed on their own followers represents one path to the ultimate goal of a 'partyless democracy'; their experiments in constitutional pluralism represent a parallel and complementary path. When I accused them of failing to understand what they were doing, I was not just mistaken; I had grasped precisely the wrong end of the stick. They know perfectly well what they are doing. They are trying to dismantle the structure of majoritarian democracy which has been fundamental to British politics for more than a century, in order to de-politicize the whole process of government.

I agree with much of this. Blair's disdain for party—and, on a deeper level, for the differences of ideology and interest which have sustained party in this and other European democracies—is almost palpable. He dreams of a united and homogeneous people, undifferentiated by class or locality, with which he, as leader, can communicate directly, without benefit of intermediaries. In his vision of it, at least, New Labour's vocation is to mobilize the suburbs as well as the inner cities; rich as well as poor; old as well as young; Christians as well as unbelievers; hunters as well as animal-rights activists; believers in family values as well as

opponents of Clause 28. Its warm embrace covers all men and women of goodwill, provided only that they are prepared to enlist in the relentless, never-ending crusade for modernization which he and his colleagues have set in motion. The 'progressive century', the lineaments of which have been sketched out by his polling guru, Philip Gould,² and which, presumably, has now begun, will be made in that same inclusive image. Only traditionalists will be excluded—Conservatives, whether with a big or small 'c'; and, of course, the still not-quite-vanquished mastodons of Old Labour.

There is no doubt that this marks a departure from the post-war norms of British majoritarian democracy. All prime ministers like to believe that they speak for the nation and many have become exasperated with their own followers, but no post-war prime minister has sought to transcend party in the way that Blair has done. There were premonitions of his statercraft in that of Mrs Thatcher, but the differences between them are more striking than the similarities. Like Thatcher, Blair is a populist, determined to communicate directly with an imaginary 'people', over the heads of his colleagues. But he is a healer where she was a warrior. His instinct is to blur sharp edges; hers was to sharpen them. He seeks to include, where she was determined to exclude. And his attempt to construct a vast, all-embracing coalition of what Mair, in a beautiful phrase, calls 'goo-goos' has nothing in common with Thatcherism. So far from trying to de-politicize government, Thatcher did her potent best to politicize it. In the end, of course, she was brought down by a party revolt. But during her triumphant heyday, she embodied the culture and instincts of the Conservative rank and file more thoroughly than any other post-war leader. So far from disdaining party, she gloried in her fierce and divisive partisanship.

A national precedent

So far, then, Mair's analysis seems to me to be on the right lines. But I part company with him on one crucial point. (In fairness I should make it clear that I only became aware of it after reading his piece.)

¹ Peter Mair, 'Partyless Democracy', NLR 2, March–April 2000.

² Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*, London 1998, pp. 391–9.

He is right in thinking that Blair has broken with the norms of British party politics as they have operated since 1945. He is wrong in suggesting that these norms were hallowed by time. Majoritarian democracy on the post-war model was a child of the upheavals of the war itself, and in particular of the seismic shift in political allegiances which made it possible for the Labour Party belatedly to become a more-or-less equal player in a new two-party system. In the interwar period, majoritarian democracy on the post-war model did not exist. A vast, hegemonic, Conservative-dominated coalition held power from 1931 to 1940, and the high probability is that if the war had not intervened it would have continued to hold power for a good deal longer. The 1920s were in some respects a different story, but only in some respects. Weak minority Labour governments held office in 1924 and from 1929 to 1931. After the 1924 general election, in which the Liberals' share of the vote fell from 29.6% to 17.6%, it was clear that the Labour Party had replaced them as the main anti-Conservative party in the state. The fact remains that Conservative or Conservative-dominated governments were in power for ten of the thirteen years from 1918 to 1931, as well as for the whole of the period from 1931 to 1940. The implications are intriguing. In this, as in other spheres, it is unwise to take Blair's futuristic rhetoric at face value. He is best seen as a Charles II, not as a Cromwell. He seeks a restoration, not a revolution. His true aim is to re-invent the Age of Baldwin, not to stride forward into a hitherto unimagined future.

In saying that, I do not mean that he is himself a second Baldwin. His contempt for tradition and his endlessly re-iterated appeals to novelty, youth and a reified 'Future' could hardly be less Baldwinesque. Yet, as Philip Williamson's distinguished recent study of Baldwin's rhetoric and statecraft shows,³ the parallels between the two are as striking as they are unexpected. To be sure, Baldwin did not openly disdain party, in the way that Blair does. He went out of his way to pay court to the House of Commons, which Blair treats with lordly indifference. But he was as anxious as Blair to construct an amorphous, broad-based coalition, going well beyond the frontiers of his own party; as eager to transcend the divisions of class and interest reflected in party conflicts; as intent on including all men and women of goodwill in a warm, purportedly non-

³ Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values*, Cambridge 1999.

political embrace; and, above all, as determined to present himself as a friendly, trustworthy, 'ordinary' person, unskilled in the arts of professional politics and uncorrupted by them. Again and again, he insisted that he was no orator; in his first broadcast speech, a masterpiece of deft, non-partisan under-statement, he apologized to the listeners for interrupting the ordinary programme.⁴ As Williamson puts it,

At elections, he focused the issue not so much upon programmes as upon sincerity and trust . . . He also thought that understatement and frankness were the most effective intonations in coping with the principal opposition: 'his chief asset with Labour was his reputation for plain dealing'. Baldwin's aim was to invert the style and values which had been widely expected from democratic politicians—to deflate demagogy and establish a different, safer, demotic idiom. Power, strength, public spirit and truth were to be identified with restraint, humility, moderation and common sense. 'Spell-binders and fire-eaters' were to be beaten by those able to display 'seriousness' and 'moral goodness'. Public speaking would be valued not for exciting radical demands, but leading 'men to dwell on the thoughts of service to their country and of help to one another'.⁵

With the art that concealed art, in short, Baldwin also sought to depoliticize government, to damp down ideological controversy and class conflict, to convince the electorate that common sense pointed in only one direction and to insist that duties came before rights. His reward was nearly twenty years of Conservative hegemony, and a party system closer to the dominant-party model of post-war Japan than to the adversarial model of post-war Britain. The parallels between Baldwin and Blair should not be pushed too far. Blair is reaching out to the middle ground from a party of the left; Baldwin did so from a party of the right. Perhaps because of this, Blair has tried earnestly (if so far fruitlessly) to construct an overt ideological justification for his statecraft. Baldwin's statecraft needed no ideological cladding, beyond the trusty standbys of fair play and patriotism. And, of course, the conditions of political life in the 1990s and 2000s are almost unimaginably different from what they were in the 1920s and 1930s. What was demotic then would sound almost mandarin now; Baldwin's nearest equivalent of a spin doctor was the ubiquitous 'IJ' (Thomas Jones), a former professor of economics. *Mutatis mutandis*, however, Blair's statecraft follows where Baldwin's

⁴ Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin*, p. 83.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

led. Like Baldwin, he seeks to de-politicize government, but *through* party, not against it. If he succeeds, New Labour will be to the 2000s and 2010s what the Conservatives were to the 1920s and 1930s. It will not bear much resemblance to the Labour Party we used to know—not least, because it will dominate the political stage in a way that Old Labour never did—but it will still be unmistakably a political party, and politics will still revolve around the conflict between it and its chief rival.

Of course, this project may not succeed. If the next election produces a narrow New Labour majority (or no majority at all), Blair may be forced to change to a proportional electoral system after all; if he does so, the Liberal Democrats will have more parliamentary leverage than any third party has had since the Irish Home Rulers before the First World War. But even that need not produce the partyless democracy of Mair's imagining. Despite some huffing and puffing, some of it quite congenial to liberal-minded people, the Liberal Democrats have conspicuously failed to define a political space, exclusive to them and unoccupied by their New Labour Big Brother. This is because no such space exists. The traditional standby of the Liberal Party of old days and more recently of the SDP–Liberal Alliance—'a plague on both your houses'; centrist moderation in place of ideological extremism—can no longer fly. As Aneurin Bevan used to say, 'you can't be deadier than dead'. In the same way, you can't be Blairier than Blair, more centrist than New Labour. In pure theory, no doubt, it might be possible for the Liberal Democrats to out-flank New Labour on the left: to become the party of a re-invented, more flexible, less bureaucratic social democracy, probably with a strong green tinge. But the really-existing New Liberals show no sign of wishing to do this, not least because their really-existing voters would not stand for it. There is no reason to believe that proportional representation would change any of this. The Liberal Democrats would still be the moon to New Labour's sun. A Baldwinesque dominant party model would still be in place, only on slightly different lines.

Rewriting the territorial constitution

Where does this leave the Blair paradox? Not where Mair left it, I suggest; but not where I left it either. Assume, for the moment, that I am right, and that Blair's real ambition is to turn New Labour into a dominant party on the lines of the interwar Conservatives. Would it be paradoxical for him to make the constitutional changes which

his Government has in fact made? The answer, I now think, is that it depends on the dynamics of the territorial constitution: on the way in which the prevailing conception of the proper relationship between central government in Whitehall and the governments of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English regions and localities evolves over time. In principle, there is no reason why a dominant-party model at the centre cannot co-exist with a different model (or models) on the periphery. In his now classic study of British territorial politics, James Bulpitt suggested that central-local relations in the United Kingdom had traditionally conformed to a pattern which he termed the 'Dual Polity'.⁶ A subtle network of unwritten conventions allotted High Politics to the central executive, and Low Politics to local governments and local elites. Each party to this implicit bargain was happy to confine its operations to its own sphere, provided that the other party did the same. Foreign policy, defence and (in the Keynesian era) macro-economic management were for the centre; service delivery for the periphery. In the 1960s and 1970s, Bulpitt thought, the Dual Polity broke down. Central government launched a series of micro-economic interventions involving detailed interference with the activities of economic agents on the ground, so trenching on the sphere of Low Politics, which had hitherto been reserved to the localities. The result was a crisis in the unwritten territorial constitution.

Much has happened since Bulpitt wrote, and his model now needs updating. The basic insight, however, is still enormously fruitful. It helps to explain the territorial turf wars of the 1980s when far-left Labour local authorities tried deliberately to undo the consequences of the Thatcher Government's macro-economic policy for their localities, and provoked ministers into a long campaign of aggressive centralization, unprecedented in modern British history. It also helps to explain the Scottish backlash which led eventually to the Scottish constitutional convention and thence to the present Government's devolution legislation. Not least, it suggests a new and more productive perspective on the Blair paradox than either Mair's or my original one. Looked at in a Bulpittian light, the real meaning of New Labour's reconstruction of the territorial constitution—by far the most important element in its constitutional

⁶ James Bulpitt, *Territory and Power in the United Kingdom: An Interpretation*, Manchester 1983.

agenda—is to make possible a return to the Dual Polity, in a new guise. And in a reinvented Dual Polity, in which government at the centre confined itself to a limited range of High Politics questions and left Low Politics to the periphery, a long period of Baldwinesque single-party dominance at Westminster could perfectly well co-exist with a variety of different regimes on other levels of governance. That, after all, is what happened in the Age of Baldwin, which Blair is trying to re-create, and for that matter in the Age of Gladstone and Salisbury. As those examples imply, such a reinvented Dual Polity would run with the grain of the capitalist renaissance, which is the central reality of our time. Ministers and officials at the centre would look after defence, foreign affairs and fiscal policy. Monetary policy would be for the Bank of England or its successor in Euroland. Within the tight constraints imposed by the rules of the global marketplace, local and regional governments of variegated hues would follow their own paths on other issues. Because High and Low Politics would be kept apart, these variations would not threaten the dominant party at the centre, any more than Lord Salisbury was threatened by the LCC or Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain by the Rhondda.

This is obviously a far cry from contemporary Blairism, but it would be wrong to assume that it is bound to remain so. The febrile centralism which has been such a marked feature of the present Government may cool down as ministers get used to office and neo-Baldwinism comes to be taken for granted. From the point of view of politicians and officials at the centre, the great beauty of the old Dual Polity was that it helped to keep expectations low and to narrow the area over which governments could be attacked. A new one would do the same. The crusade for modernization would have to be given up, of course. But once the crusaders realise that their efforts have brought them no nearer the Holy Land, they may be relieved to abandon it. Government would indeed be depoliticized; Mair is right about that. But it would be crass to blame Blair alone. The real point is that an untamed capitalism requires a tamed democracy.

ANTHONY BARNETT

CORPORATE POPULISM AND PARTYLESS DEMOCRACY

ANY SCIENTIST OR SCHOLAR, especially one attempting to decipher the forces at work in contemporary politics, will be familiar with the strange moments when a dubious, even mistaken line of thought leads to an original and, in an important way, true conclusion. It seems to me that this is what has happened with Peter Mair's examination of Britain's New Labour government. I am confident that his analysis of what its leadership intends is flawed. He quotes the unelected, and unelectable, Lord Chancellor, Lord Irvine (in a footnote but without irony) stating, 'We have set out to be a Government which returns power to the people'. He cites Blair's overblown Party Conference peroration in September 1999 that the 'cause' is to 'set our people free'. To take such statements seriously is to mistake rhetoric for purpose. As Ralph Dahrendorf has pointed out, the Prime Minister never spontaneously talks about liberty.¹ In this case he clearly told his speech writers to steal a Tory slogan. Mair is absolutely right to take the New Labour leaders seriously. But there is a difference between taking them seriously and taking them literally.

When they speak, often the most interesting things to note are the differences between them, which reveal something of the stresses the Government now feels. In the passage quoted, Blair refers to 'our people', using the possessive—hardly the instinctive language of someone dedicated to 'returning' power to them. The other half of the Irvine sentence is: 'the people from whom power ultimately derives'. As a lawyer he must be well aware that this 'Scottish' view of sovereignty is not constitutional orthodoxy in England. It is possible that Irvine, as a follower of John Smith, briefly the Labour leader prior to Blair, would

like to see a re-definition of British sovereignty. If so, it is one which the Prime Minister appears to have rejected and has certainly actively refused to endorse.

The Prime Minister is not, as Mair claims in his conclusion, 'currently engaged in what amounts to a full-blooded constitutional revolution'. The point of contention between us is the term 'full-blooded'. This implies a coherent purpose, a constructive aim, and a conscious desire to draw a line under the past. That a constitutional revolution has indeed begun in a destructive sense is clearly the case. It is the most important point. However, the 'revolution' will be much more far-reaching than most of the Labour Cabinet, including the Prime Minister if not Irvine himself, understand. They have triggered the endgame for a regime that dates back to 1688. Whether this ending will take five or fifty years is not yet clear. Without doubt it will be seen to have begun with the astonishing twenty constitutional bills passed in its first three sessions by Blair's administration.

The vanishing Rubicon

The revolution is not full-blooded because New Labour does not want it to be. It would be hard to find a more authoritative yet anaemic description of its character than the declaration of the Government's leader in the House of Lords, Baroness Jay, endorsing the Wakeham Commission's proposed plans for the reform of the second chamber. 'We think that one of the strengths of the report is that it is evolutionary. As such, it is firmly within our tradition of constitutional and parliamentary change. When we look at our history, it is rare to say that a Rubicon was crossed in that process—a Rubicon that changed everything overnight.'¹ Jay's pronouncement echoed the line of the Commission itself. The way Britain updates itself, in their view, remains the same.

Some of her colleagues may enjoy a better supply of red corpuscles. At the end of the same debate, summing up for the Government, the Attorney-General, Lord Williams, presented a lamentable defence of the official position on Lords reform, as he was obliged to do. Then he sud-

¹ *New Statesman* 6 September 1999.

² *Hansard*, House of Lords, 7 March 2000, col. 911.

denly dropped his guard. Earlier in the debate the Tory academic Philip Norton had congratulated 'the noble Baroness' on her defence of an 'evolutionary approach' and added that as a Conservative it made him 'happy'. But he questioned whether she was right to imply that this was indeed a description of her Government's overall approach to constitutional change.

It has been difficult to engage in debate with the Government because . . . Ministers regularly avoid answering my questions on what intellectually coherent approach to constitutional change they favoured. The noble Baroness spoke of an evolutionary approach . . . but the Government's approach to other constitutional changes is not evolutionary. The Government have treated changes in a discrete manner, each unrelated to the other changes that they have introduced. That is a stance which is intellectually unacceptable and constitutionally dangerous.

Given that, I invite . . . the Attorney-General, in his reply, to explain how the Government's broad acceptance of the report of the Royal Commission fits in with their conception of constitutional change . . . I invite him to address the wider picture and tell us not only what the Government will do but also where they believe they are going.³

One would have expected a bluff response of the kind Irvine himself goes in for, that the Government fully understands the different modernizations it is undertaking and there is no question of incoherence or incompatibility between them. But instead of reiterating Jay's evolutionary perspective, Williams replied:

It was said by the noble Lord, Lord Norton, that our approach to the House of Lords reform is somehow different in nature and essence from our approach to other constitutional reforms. That is a misreading of the situation. It ought not to be overlooked that one of the most fundamental constitutional changes that this Government has introduced—I suggest that it may well be the most fundamental one—is the introduction of the Human Rights Act. Once that is embodied in the fabric and full heart of our society, nothing will ever be the same again.⁴

In short, a Rubicon. But then again, perhaps not. Barely a week earlier Blair gave a major speech on the 100th anniversary of the Labour Party.

³ Ibid., cols. 980–1.

⁴ Ibid., col. 1032.

In the course of his historical overview, he proceeded to sum up his Government's achievements. He referred to Lords reform and devolution in passing, but in disconnected passages. The words 'constitutional reform' did not pass his lips and the Human Rights Act was not mentioned at all.

Personally, I do not think that the Human Rights Act in itself will change everything, any more than any other of the reforms taken on their own. Their combination, however, is more than radicalizing. To give Scotland a parliament and reform the Lords and not address Scotland's new status in the latter is asking for trouble—the centre has been weakened at the same time as the periphery has been strengthened. The Human Rights Act will further undermine the authority of the Commons just when it could wish for greater legitimacy in its dealings with London or Wales. Mair suggests that New Labour is coherent and purposive. I agree it is purposive. I hope I have shown that its incoherence is not just a matter of a gap between the effects of its constitutional reforms and their presentation. Senior Ministers even produce utterly contrary interpretations in the same debate.

This is not the place to go further into the extraordinary confusion of official policies. This is being addressed in many quarters, not least in the forthcoming Charter 88 strategy document, *Prospects and Plans for Twenty Ten*. The question here is: what are we to make of it? Peter Mair is generous. He says one cannot just conclude that they 'don't know what they are doing'. Of course not. Different members of the Government understand what they are doing differently and quite possibly all of them are mistaken. David Marquand's argument that the Blair leadership does not understand the forces it has released should not be interpreted as meaning that it is without aims. Rather, when Mair writes, 'It is still unclear whether this attempt to transform the governing culture in Britain can be carried through to its intended conclusions', he assumes too great a sense of cogent purpose in Downing Street. Blair has a set of instincts and approaches that are a mixture of the radical and the cautious, a will to rule in the narrowest sense and a desire for the largest possible endorsement of his power. He also came to a deliberate and debated view that New Labour's constitutional reforms would not be of sufficient consequence to warrant a formal explanation or advocacy of them as a programme. In this he was mistaken.

Mair sees that Labour's reforms are likely to bring to an end what he describes as Britain's 'majoritarian democracy'. He thinks the country will become a contemporary European polity of a more consensual kind, and argues this is what Blair wants. That Blair may not be suggested by his recoil from proportional representation, and determination to conserve a second chamber completely subordinate to the first, itself already a patsy in the hands of the executive. Blair has done everything possible to limit the radical logic of his constitutional reforms and preserve elected dictatorship (majoritarian democracy). 'Constitutional interruptus' is how I describe it.⁵ Wales can have an assembly but not the First Minister it wants. A 'Right to Know' is proposed, then withdrawn, only to return emasculated. Hereditary peers are to be abolished, yet ninety-two of them are allowed to remain and the promise of a democratic second chamber is dropped.

In Scotland and Wales this pattern has proved provocative, strengthening arguments for independence—just the opposite of what the Government intended and expected. But it was blindingly obvious that this would happen. It was not hard to predict that Blair's decision to stitch up the Welsh Assembly by imposing Alun Michael as First Minister would prove a 'Pyrrhic victory'.⁶ Nonetheless, as with Ken Livingstone and London, the directors of New Labour dismissed all such warnings in the belief that they knew better. One can only conclude that they had no understanding of the forces they might be releasing.

A new model consensus?

Mair sees Madison as one of the founding theorists of the consensual, anti-factional politics that he contrasts to traditional British majoritarian rule. This leads him to suggest that the Blair 'project is Madisonian in inspiration'. My own view on the historical point is that, in the aftermath of the American War of Independence, the British and American political elites were engaged in rather similar efforts to protect themselves from what they took to be the principal threats to their rule—military or monarchical usurpation on the one hand, and 'King Mob' on the other. Each created 'republican' systems (taking the term in a pre-modern

⁵ *Prospect*, February 1999.

⁶ See my article on this in the *Observer*, 7 February 1999.

sense) to achieve this. Madison, of course, explicitly contrasted a republican to a democratic order—by which he meant the direct rule of the people.⁷ Bagehot, in his later comparative assessment of the two political systems, argued that England's was in reality an 'efficient republic'. In both, the elected representative was the key mechanism for ensuring the allegiance of the populace to public authority while keeping it safely at arm's length from the application of power. The modern party system grew out of the organization of elected representatives. It is 'party democracy' which is now in question.

Mair is surely right to regard this as a potentially momentous change. His argument is that New Labour's ultimate objective is a partyless democracy. This is a very helpful analysis, not least because, as Mair points out, the ambition is dangerous and potentially undemocratic. Blair is a natural exponent of the end of ideology. He certainly believes in government, not the notional laissez-faire of the eighties, but for him deciding the best policies is not a 'tribal' or political matter—and therefore not a party issue either. 'Remember that what matters is outcomes, what matters is what works', is a now familiar refrain—this example comes from a recent speech delivered, significantly, to Labour activists in local government.⁸ The phrase has also been flourished by Irvine, who has elevated its pragmatism virtually to the status of a philosophy.

There are many sources for such anti-politics. One lies in the attractions of 'consensus' which, as Trevor Smith observed as he reflected on the sixties, 'whether real or imagined is ultimately prejudicial to democracy whose main foundation is organized conflict'.⁹ Another source is the revulsion from a 'politics of lies' and desire to 'live in truth' that Václav Havel expressed so eloquently in 'The Power of the Powerless'.¹⁰ While his was a defence of dissent under Stalinism, it has clearly also appealed to the widespread desire for a more authentic public life in the West, beyond the sterile mendacity of organized party lines, which has been one of the reasons for the growth of public interest groups that organize

⁷ *Federalist Papers* X.

⁸ Tony Blair, 'Speech to Labour Local Governance Conference', Blackpool, 6 February 2000.

⁹ Trevor Smith, *Anti-Politics*, London 1972, p. 20.

¹⁰ Václav Havel, *Living in Truth*, London 1986, pp. 3–35.

with less compromise on a chosen agenda. The weakening of political party draws on both undemocratic and democratic impulses.

Mair makes the acute observation that the very word 'party' is being dropped in country after country across Europe as rulers seek a less mediated, more direct relationship with the ruled. He sees those now in charge of the British state as pioneers in the search for a politics beyond politics, as they modernize—in fact—the end of politics. He does not discuss the role of the media in this. The impact of television has been decisive. In a sharp survey of New Labour, Thomas Meyer identifies 'a very radical type of Clintonization of political communication . . . by the strategic apex of the Labour Party', which has:

subordinated everything else including the party's discourse, the role of the party and even the role of the parliamentary party . . . to the rule of the perceived necessities of successful media communication of the party leader's image and his symbolic project . . . The image of the leader hero, the selection of the issues and the design of the way they are presented to the media, the disciplining of the party and all its actors beneath the strategic apex have not only created a new way to conduct politics but also a new type of relation between the social democratic party, its members, its leadership and its relation with society as a whole. Therefore, it cannot be seen as a change in marketing and communications only, it is rather a substantially new type—defining the role of the party in the process of formulating and implementing policies. It is basically nothing less than a new type of media-democracy.¹¹

It would be hard to put it better. Partyless democracy is media-saturated democracy and part of its credibility comes from the way leaders can now be known in an apparently personal way by many millions.

Corporate populism

Mair criticizes my development of the concept of 'corporate populism' as a term to describe New Labour's approach.¹² I think that it fits well with instinctive efforts to encourage partyless democracy. When Mair remarks that 'populism in its pure form is completely antithetical to the constitutionalist elements of modern republican thinking and it is

¹¹ Thomas Meyer, 'The Third Way, Some Crossroads', *Forum: Scholars for European Social Democracy*, Working Papers 1, p. 4.

¹² *Prospect*, February 1999.

these, above all, that inform the Blair project', I suspect that he is wrong in his confidence that Blair's project includes the erection of 'republican' impediments to his own policies; but I know he is wrong about my analysis.

Corporate populism is first of all corporate, in the sense that it is modelled on the behaviour of corporations. Blair's is a committed administration which is determined to make its mark. In this it bears comparison with the Attlee government of 1945 to 1950 rather than the hapless Wilson and Callaghan administrations of the sixties and seventies. There is more than an incidental point of resemblance here. Attlee was obsessed with businesslike efficiency and the delivery of clear decisions, as Amy Baker's new study shows.¹³ His way with a series of nationalizations, including even the formation of the National Health Service, could be compared to Blair's approach to constitutional reform. Some initiatives were excellent; others less well-conceived. Each industry was nationalized separately and was run by familiar management in top-down fashion. No joining-up was permitted between, for example, the new electricity, gas and coal utilities. There was no element of popular democratization to give legitimacy to the new public corporations. They were justified as a piecemeal set of separate modernizations. The result was a complex of bureaucracies against which the Conservatives were eventually able to turn public prejudice.

Today, Downing Street is also obsessed with businesslike decision-making. Only, the model of business has changed. Attlee was dissatisfied with the way Churchill conducted affairs of state. Yet if the private sector had presided over mass unemployment and low investment in the thirties, the state had emerged from the test of war intact, with a reputation for delivery. Thus while Attlee wanted decisions to be taken much more efficiently, he could regard British government and its mandarin culture as the natural home of such efficiency.

New Labour did not inherit this tradition. On the contrary, by the end of the Thatcher years, it was companies that were seen as successful agents of modernization and job creation, while government was held to be wasteful and inert, driven by procedures not outcomes. New Labour

¹³ Amy Baker, *Prime Ministers and The Rule Book*, London 2000.

looked to modern business management to teach it how to deliver, Blair comparing himself to a chief executive. By setting targets, policing delivery, insisting on outcomes, advocating joined-up administration, Ministers project themselves as a businesslike team. Theirs is not a pluralist vision of the state. At the same time they have to 'sell' or market their achievements. They understand that the way a policy is projected is an essential part of the policy, much in the way that the design of a consumer durable is today part of the product itself—no one creating software would treat its appearance as a neutral function separate from its performance. Hence New Labour's determination to end the civil service tradition of issuing non-partisan press releases about new policy initiatives. Finally, just as no major business restricts its market in advance to a minority, but instead strives for universal popularity and brand loyalty, so New Labour seeks to sell its product to everyone.

Readers can judge for themselves whether the concept of corporate populism tallies as a description of the inner workings and attitudes of the Blair administration. He and his team regard running Britain as like being in charge of a major media corporation. In my view this is a concept that helps to explain:

- ▶ The positive motivation of its members, their 'can do' activism, legislative ambition, concern for application of policy on the ground, and embrace of opportunity and risk.
- ▶ Their wish for universal, focus-group-monitored, appeal; in Albert Hirschman's terms they strive for brand loyalty while pre-empting exit and voice.
- ▶ Their inability to comprehend the strength of 'un-businesslike', 'old-fashioned' popular sentiments, such as Welshness, Englishness or support for Ken Livingstone.
- ▶ Their dismissive yet erratic attitude towards traditional, non-market institutions such as the British constitution.
- ▶ Their attachment to the media-entertainment complex as the key channel for communications strategies, and consequent by-passing of the political party as an antiquated debating machine.

- ▶ Their embrace of wealth-creators and big, especially international business, combined with willingness to encourage initiatives that short-circuit ineffective local government on the ground—experiments that out-source services, prevent waste and help people into work and off welfare.
- ▶ Their commitment to a unified civil service, flying in the face of the logic of devolution.
- ▶ Their resolute centralism and commitment to a single, strategic intelligence in possession of the ‘big picture’, controlling the image, ensuring consistency.
- ▶ Finally, the concept explains why—for all the tactical skill and market research brought to it—the project will go wrong, because a country is not like a company and cannot be run as if it were.

Blair and Co. have been seduced by the absolute sovereignty offered them by the British state. They are seeking to preserve its glory by modernizing the means of it. They have yet to understand that the kind of central power it represents is intrinsically outdated.

I am grateful for Peter Mair’s attention to the idea of corporate populism; but I think it has survived its baptism under his fire. We both agree that efforts to remove traditional political parties from the equations of modern politics offer a dangerously choiceless and fatalistic version of democracy. Also, that such efforts will probably end in tears. We may disagree over the extent to which the Blair government intends the constitutional ends towards which its policies lead, but we share the conviction that New Labour is the agent of novel forces, which should not be lightly dismissed.

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PETER WOLLEN

GOVERNMENT BY APPEARANCES

IN THE COURSE OF HIS celebrated discussion of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, Michel Foucault wondered whether Bentham had got the idea for his perfect prison from Le Vau's octagonal design for Louis XIV's menagerie at Versailles: 'At the centre was an octagonal pavilion which, on the first floor, consisted of only a single room, the king's salon; on every side large windows looked out onto seven cages (the eighth was reserved for the entrance), containing different species of animals. By Bentham's time, this menagerie had disappeared. But one finds in the programme of the Panopticon a similar concern with individuating observation, with characterization and classification, with the analytic arrangement of space. The Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man, individual distribution by specific grouping and the king by the machinery of a furtive power.'¹ Like the Panopticon, Louis's menagerie was a kind of observatory in which, from a single central point of view, a series of specimens, both confined and illuminated, could be examined and controlled. Observation was indeed for Louis a form of mastery. As Colbert noted at the opening of a new Observatory in 1671: 'Triumphal Arch for the conquests of the Earth. Observatory for the heavens.'²

It is hard not to take another step and wonder whether it was not so much the menagerie as the Court of Versailles itself that was the virtual prototype of the Panopticon. In the Memoirs prepared for his son and heir, Louis came rapidly to this vivid summation, when discussing the work of the King:

All that is most necessary to this work is at the same time agreeable; for, in a word, my son, it is to have one's eyes open to the whole earth; to learn each hour the news concerning every province and every nation, the secrets of every court, the moods and the weaknesses of every prince and every foreign minister; to be well-informed on an infinite number of matters about which

we are supposed to know nothing; to elicit from our subjects what they hide from us with the greatest care; to discover the most remote opinions of our own courtiers and the most hidden interests of those who come to us with quite contrary professions. I do not know of any other pleasure we would not renounce for that, even if it was given to us out of curiosity alone.¹

In a nutshell, the nobility of France were confined, illuminated (and classified) in the palace of Versailles in order to gratify the solar scopophilia of their all-seeing supervisor, a pleasure in looking which led directly to the sublimated sadism of his pleasure in governing and ordering.

Yet Louis's regime is usually associated not with surveillance so much as with display, with exhibitionism rather than voyeurism; with the fabrication of the king's image as visual spectacle, rather than the pleasure of the king as the furtive power at the centre of a global panopticon. Foucault begins his book by describing, in grim and gruesome detail, the 'spectacle of the scaffold', a ceremony of annihilation, revealing an absolute lack of power, in contrast to the positive spectacles of the king's totalized surplus of power—the coronation, the entry into a subject city, the submissive ceremonial of the court. Yet, in Foucault's view, this regime was soon to be swept away and reversed by another—that of surveillance, with the panopticon rather than the public scaffold as its emblematic figure. In the economy of this order, the annihilation or concentration of power were doubled by a spectacular fragmentation or surplus of the body, whereas within that of surveillance, the body is idealized (the observer) or classified and disciplined (the observed), reduced to an abstract order rather than vividly displayed in its concrete carnality.

The dancing king

It is clear that the image of Louis XIV was indeed that of a spectacularly excessive body, enhanced by all the resources of art, ceremonial and ritual. It was a body magnified and designed to be looked at. Courtiers

¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline And Punish*, New York 1979.

² Cited from Charles Perrault's *Mémoires* in Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, Newhaven 1992.

³ Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, Paris 1978, presented and edited by Jean Lognon.

were forbidden to turn their back on it and, in his absence, they were even forbidden to show their heels to his portrait, which hung in his place, and substituted for his presence, a true 'representation'.⁴ Perhaps the most directly spectacular display of the king's body was that of the king as dancer. In this role, the king was explicitly a performer, literally centre stage in the theatrical sense. The king danced over a hundred roles in public and the court ballet was, for a period, the leading art form of the court, in which the royal family and high nobility both participated as performers and formed the admiring audience, attending as both stars and fans.⁵

Louis's father had himself been an accomplished dancer and musician, dancing in court ballets and singing and playing the lute to airs of his own composition. From an early age, Louis was given dancing lessons and he became an adept and enthusiastic pupil. He is said by a contemporary to have had a dancing lesson every day for over twenty years from his dancing master, Charles Beauchamps, and his medical records show evidence of collapse after exhausting dance rehearsals as well as injury incurred by strenuous vaulting.⁶ He seems to have had an acute musical sense, being able 'to distinguish among a troop of musicians the one who makes a false note',⁷ and as a result he insisted on high musical standards at his court. During his youth, he is reported to have practised the guitar and discussed dance steps rather than sit through tedious meetings of the royal council. The Venetian ambassador noted censoriously in 1652, when Louis was fourteen, that 'games, dances and comedies are the king's sole pursuits'.⁸ The previous year he had made his debut public appearance on the serious stage as a dancer in the Court Ballet of the Feasts of Bacchus, in which he appeared in a number of roles, culminating in that of Apollo.

⁴ *Fabrication of Louis XIV.*

⁵ For Louis as dancer, see especially Marie-Françoise Christout, *Le Ballet de Cour de Louis XIV*, Paris 1967; Robert M. Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King*, Ithaca 1973; and Charles I. Silin, *Benserade and his Ballets de Cour*, Baltimore 1940.

⁶ Antoine Vallot, Antoine d'Aquin and Guy-Crescent Fagon, *Journal de la Santé du Roi Louis XIV*, Paris 1862, presented and edited by J.-A. Le Roi.

⁷ Cited in Isherwood from Jacques Bonnet, *Histoire de la Musique et ses Effets*, Paris 1715.

⁸ Cited in Isherwood from Maurice Ashley, *Louis XIV and the Greatness of France*, London 1948.

Louis continued to dance on stage for almost twenty years. He made his final public appearance in 1670, leaving the stage, of course, once more in the role of Apollo. Thus, dance was not simply a childhood pursuit, to be abandoned with maturity. On the contrary, he continued to dance in public for ten years after his famous seizure of power, following the death of Mazarin and the arrest of Fouquet. Perhaps even more significantly, the first Academy he established was the Royal Academy of Dance. Louis took power on 10 March 1661 and on the 31st of the same month he issued the Letters Patent which established the new Academy. As he observed in the Letters, 'The art of dance has always been recognized as one of the most respectable and necessary to train the body and to give it the first and most natural dispositions to every kind of exercise, to that of arms among others; consequently, it is one of the most advantageous and useful to our nobility and to others who have the honour of approaching us, not just in war times, but even in times of peace in the divertissements of our ballets.'⁹

Taming the court

The establishment of Academies became a keystone of Louis's regime. First, this fulfilled a mercantilist function, establishing the arts as a form of luxury good, no longer imported at great expense from Italy, but produced under the direction of the state, thus contributing to the abundant wealth and treasure of France. Second, there was also a propaganda function, glorifying the king and celebrating his exploits. The Academies further institutionalized the cultural programme favoured by Louis of honouring serious training and serious learning as the armature of courtly accomplishments, thus encouraging the formation of a polished and reasonable court culture rather than a crude and passionate one, more sublimated, less driven. This softening or sweetening of the court was, of course, particularly 'useful', as Louis liked to say, in that it diminished the threat of impulsive noble outbursts, which in previous times had led to disorder and disobedience. The Academies also served a direct political function in limiting and replacing the authority of the old independent craft guilds.

⁹ Cited in Isherwood from the *Lettres patentes du roi pour l'établissement d'une Académie royale de danse en la ville de Paris*, reprinted in G. A. Crapelet, *Notices sur la vie et ouvrages de Quinault*, Paris 1824.

At the same time, lessons in dance were coupled with lessons in arms. Louis himself makes the same linkage in his *Memoirs*, when he remarks that 'if you believe your dancing master and your master-at-arms, and all the others, they will tell you, and it is true, that their art requires a total commitment [*l'homme tout entier*] and there is always something still to learn'—but, Louis continues, the king has to draw a limit to these pleasurable pursuits, which although they are worthwhile—even politically worthwhile—can become counter-productive in their effects if they are taken to extremes and thus detract from other weightier priorities.¹⁰ He reminds his heir of the bygone king who asked his son why he was not ashamed to perform so well on the lyre. This section, incidentally, was edited in its final form, by Pelisson, soon after Louis's own last on-stage performance.¹¹

Louis's establishment of the Academy of Dance was contested, naturally enough, by the musicians' guild, the Brotherhood of Saint-Julian, who argued that dancing should not be separated from music, which was its model. The dancing masters, in response, argued that dance was independent of music. They, too, stressed the importance of training the body and improving its posture and gait, noting that good dancers had often been able to rise rapidly in a military career. Trained dancers are 'more able to serve their prince in battles and to please him in divertissements'.¹² The violins to which dancers danced were no more necessary, they argued, than the drums and trumpets which encouraged soldiers to fight. The violins did not dictate the movements of the dance any more than the drums dictated the course of the battle. Here, it should be noted, the choreographers were implicitly comparing themselves to officers, in charge of both drill and manoeuvres. Dance, they also argued, improves the mind as well as the body, by polishing the manners of the nation, unlike music which, by implication, acts only on the passions. Perhaps also they had in mind the character of dance as an emblematic art, much emphasized by other contemporary theorists,

¹⁰ *Mémoires*.

¹¹ For the respective roles of Louis XIV and his collaborators in the composition of his *Mémoires*, see Jean-Louis Thureau, *Les Idées Politiques de Louis XIV*, Paris 1973.

¹² Cited in Isherwood from Anon, *Etablissement de l'Académie royale de danse en la ville de Paris*, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, BN ms fr 21732, fols. 273r–273v.

especially the Jesuits, who insisted on the allegorical aspect of dance as 'mute poetry'.³

Professionals and amateurs

Given the support of the king, the dancers were of course vindicated. However, the establishment of an Academy had long-term and, I think, unforeseen repercussions. One of Louis's main motivations seems to have been his wish to improve the standard of dancing at court, which had been disrupted by the effects of the Fronde in the previous decade. In the end, however, the Academy led to a professionalization of dance, from which even the most gifted amateurs found themselves excluded. In this respect, the history of dance in France in the seventeenth century is not unlike the history of sports such as cricket in England in the nineteenth century, as professional 'Players' gradually gained the upper hand over amateur 'Gentlemen'. Gentlemen survived longest as team captains, before this citadel too finally fell to the Players. Even today, however, they still carry weight as team selectors. Much the same trajectory was followed in the dance. Originally, all the dancers were amateurs. Then professionals were added (first male, then female) in supporting roles until, finally, all the performers were professional, even if the patrons remained amateur.

This professionalization of the stage following the establishment of the Academy was also accompanied by the development of Italian perspective stage design and the lavish use of Italian stage machinery. The Italian stage designers and machinists, Torelli and Vigorani, were imported into Paris to construct machines for special effects, first in a specialized *salle des machines* at the Tuileries palace, then for use in the open-air festivals at Versailles which became a major preoccupation of the king. Unlike the traditional court ballet, which was fundamentally a Shrovetide entertainment, incorporating elements of carnival masquerade and grotesquerie, these large-scale productions were financed, not from the Office of Small Pleasures [*menus plaisirs*], but out of Colbert's budget for Buildings. Consequently they were also memorialized by Félibien, the official historian of royal artistic

³ See, for instance, the copious works on dance of Claude-François Menestrier, himself a Jesuit.

enterprises.¹⁴ Before Louis's seizure of power, Mazarin had tried to import Italian opera into the French court, on the model of the Barberini court in Rome, complete with professional Italian singers, including castrati, but as a result of violent political opposition this was dropped until the Italian-born Lully proved able to launch a suitably French form of opera, *tragédie lyrique*. An Academy of Opera was established by Louis in June 1669, a few months before his departure from the stage, and Lully's first opera, *Psyche*, was the command performance which immediately followed the abandonment of court ballet by Louis. Opera, of course, involved fully professional singers and musicians, while still retaining professional dancers for interludes.¹⁵

Thus the spectacle of the king and nobility as dancers could only last as long as the gap between amateur and professional performance had not widened too visibly. The perspective stage, with its transformation of point-of-view and clear separation of performer and spectator into two distinct spaces, was a precondition of professionalization, as was the capital investment involved in complex stage machinery. As Louis recognized, kings could not allow themselves to be, in effect, professionalized, however great their natural gifts and ambition to excel. The king was forced to choose social dancing rather than show dancing. Court ballet had originally emerged out of informal revels and, soon after Louis's retirement from the stage, the court returned to social dancing, but in a more formal mode, dependent on dancing masters as leaders of fashion, while their professional performances were displaced from court on to the commercial stage.

Thus, in the palace of Versailles, dancing still remained a central feature of court life, alongside card-playing and billiards, but it was no longer spectacular. It had become, once again, simply a pastime. On the other hand, it was a much more ordered and polished pastime than it had been in the days of the Valois. One of the main achievements

¹⁴ On Félibien's role, especially in memorializing Versailles, see in particular Louis Marin, *Portrait of the King*, London 1988. On the entertainments organized at Versailles, see Emile Magne, *Les Plaisirs et les Fêtes en France au XVII^e Siècle*, Geneva 1944; and Philippe Beaussant, *Versailles, Opéra*, Paris 1981. For Torelli and seventeenth-century stage design, see Jocelyn Powell, *Restoration Theatre Production*, London 1984.

¹⁵ For the chequered history of opera under Louis's regime, see Isherwood.

of the Academy was to refine the social dances learned by the nobility. The energetic hopping and cavorting of rustic and exotic dances was smoothed into the acceptable forms of the court versions of the gavotte, courante, minuet and so on. In fact, the minuet began its long reign precisely in 1670, when it was first danced socially at court.¹⁶ In effect, from the point of view of a courtier, the recreational minuet replaced the spectacular court ballet, which abandoned the court for the theatre.

This process of refinement went hand-in-hand with those of notation and standardization. It was in this period that Charles Beauchamps developed, for the Academy, the dance notation of graphs and symbols which, in due course, allowed any aspiring dancer to learn and study social dances at home from a handbook. These books all had a similar structure: first came a description and notation of the five basic positions of the feet, then the five so-called 'false' positions (used for comic effect), followed by the basic steps, their combination into dance routines and extra details like arm movements. They also contained instruction on the various modes of bowing, curtseying and so on, which framed the dances by constituting and de-constituting the couple. In the more sophisticated books, court etiquette was also described, as an essential part of the framing of the dance, explaining how to relate to the presence of the king.¹⁷ The dancing-master who wrote or used these books pedagogically became a key figure in aristocratic society and, in the end, a much-lampooned target for reformers and revolutionaries, who sought a less 'artificial' and more 'natural' body.

Bureaucracy and ballet

At the same time, the choreography and notation of the professional ballet as a theatrical form was also developed. Indeed ballet still uses the French terminology-of-art developed in Beauchamps's Academy. It might almost be said that bureaucracy and ballet were the two great legacies left us by Louis XIV—and perhaps this would neither have surprised nor shocked him! Like the ant and the grasshopper, they formed a linked pair of contraries. Indeed, Louis divided his time between administrative

¹⁶ See A. H. Franks, *Social Dance*, London 1963.

¹⁷ See Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, Bolognâ 1370; *Recueil de danses*, Westminster 1977; and Pierre Rameau, *The Dancing Master*, Lōndōn 1931.

duties in the morning, hunting in the afternoon, dancing and diversion in the evening, and sleep and sex at night. It was in the morning and the evening that he made his most lasting contributions. Both administration and dancing came to require, under his regime, the establishment of accurate records, fixed routines and assiduous practice.

In this sense, we can see in dance itself the seeds of the regulated social order that Foucault was to write about in *Discipline and Punish*. Indeed, Foucault himself comments on the role played by the institution of military drill in France at the same period. The military provides the third term that links bureaucracy and ballet: both the hierarchical, rule-governed model of organization and the site of bodily discipline and routine, displayed theatrically in the form of the military review. Indeed, the seventeenth-century army shared with seventeenth-century dance not only a fascination with measure and rhythm, but also a certain spirit of geometry: the complex patterns traced on the floor by the dancers and illustrated in the dancing manuals have their counterparts in the patterns made by marching soldiers on the parade ground, or even the plans for fortifications drawn up for Louis XIV by Vauban.¹⁸ Similarly, the regime of confinement which Louis instituted in his army by building barracks paralleled not only his construction of prisons, hospitals and orphanages, but also the enclosure of the nobility in the palace of Versailles, where the dance-floor replaced the drill-hall.¹⁹

Sharing the spectacle

Military activities, like dancing, were also enacted as spectacles for the court, which Louis would take with him in order to observe and applaud a siege; and, in the recreational form of riding and hunting, they were also part of the everyday social life of the king and the courtiers. Indeed, in the spectacular *carrousel* or tournament, soldiering and dancing more or less blended together, as intricate equestrian ballet merged with com-

¹⁸ Current debate on the 'military revolution' of the seventeenth century begins with Michael Roberts, *The Military Revolution, 1560-1660*, Belfast 1956. See also Michael Duffy, ed., *The Military Revolution and the State*, Exeter 1980, and Jeremy Black, *The Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1550-1800*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ 1991.

¹⁹ See Mary Elizabeth Perry, 'The Popular History of the Reign', in Paul Sonnino, ed., *The Reign of Louis XIV*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ 1990.

petitive jousting in one choreographed show. It was at the *carrousel* of 1662 that Louis first assumed his heraldic device of the Sun as an official emblem.²⁰ In his *Memoirs*, he dwells on this *carrousel* at some length, describing how, originally intended simply as a light amusement, it was expanded into a magnificent allegorical spectacle.²¹ He reflects on its double impact on the people at large and on the court in particular. For the multitude, it was simply a spectacle and, as such, more effective in winning their hearts than tangible rewards or benefits. For the court, however, it was a way of sharing and, so to speak, co-operating in an enjoyable activity with his nobles, so that they were charmed by his courteous familiarity with them. In a word, it was a convivial way of bonding while, at the same time, preserving a necessary formality and ceremonial calibration of rank.

Louis explained this in two contexts. On the one hand, he harked back to the excesses and disorders of the Fronde. Louis drew two conclusions from this traumatic period. First, as king, he should centralize power. Second, he should convince the nobility that this was really to their benefit. This was to be done by appealing, not simply to their interests, but also to their passions. Immuring his nobility at court both separated them from their local, territorial power bases and also opened up for them the chance of participating in a novel and splendid way of life, in which the king shared his greatest pleasures with them. Together they would form a glorious company like the Gods of Olympus or like Charlemagne and his paladins, model courts invoked over and over again in the ballets and other *divertissements* he organized for them. They would ride with the king, feast with the king, dance with the king, act with the king, identify with the king.

In contrast, Louis drew the picture of the cruel despot who ruled over a servile people by means of fear and terror. Evidently, Louis was willing to resort to cruel means in dealing with rebels or in raising taxes (from which the nobility were mostly immune), but as far as the court was concerned, charm and good feeling were to be the rule of the day. Despots, he pointed out, hid themselves away, so that they were scarcely ever seen. Louis, on the other hand, was happy to hold audiences and

²⁰ *Les Plaisirs et les Fêtes*.

²¹ *Mémoires*.

to hear public requests and petitions. He willingly mingled with the nobility every day, sharing their lives, while still retaining the necessary formal distance. Thus Louis sat comfortably in his armchair, while the court perched nearby on stools or remained standing, at a slight distance, and he scarcely ever chose to tower over them from an elevated throne—only, in fact, when he joined them in greeting the Ambassadors from Turkey, Persia, Algiers and Siam.²³ Plainly there was an implicit theory of ‘Oriental Despotism’ here. But the significant point was that Louis routinely granted access to his subjects (‘the honour of approaching’), particularly to the nobility, whereas despots hid themselves away like the furtive powers in the Panopticon. Dancing together was an important aspect of this strategy of access and conviviality, meant to underline the fact that the common interests of king and nobility ran deeper than their differences. It symbolically recreated the ambience of an earlier feudal society with its ties of personal loyalty and its mythic bodily solidarity of Frankish race and noble blood.

Politics of sight

It is clear that the connexion between spectacle and surveillance is more complex than the simple transition which Foucault suggests. Indeed, this has already been pointed out in other contexts. For instance, Jonathan Crary, in his book, *Techniques of the Observer*, dealing with nineteenth-century theories and techniques of perception, notes that ‘Foucault’s opposition of surveillance and spectacle seems to overlook how the effects of these two regimes of power can coincide.’ As it developed in the early nineteenth century, ‘The organization of mass culture was fully embedded within the same transformations Foucault outlines’—i.e. regulation, codification, fixing the observer, etcetera.²³ Crary obviously wishes to integrate Foucault’s concept of surveillance with Guy Debord’s concept of the ‘Society of the Spectacle’.²⁴ Nonetheless, like Foucault, he still sees a crucial break occurring at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the ever-increasing ‘dissociation of touch from sight’ taking place ‘within a pervasive “separation of the senses” and

²³ *Fabrication of Louis XIV.*

²³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990.

²⁴ Guy Debord, *Le Société de Spectacle*, Paris 1987. English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York 1994.

industrial remapping of the body' that marks the end of absolutism. Thus, in Crary's view, both Foucault and Debord were investigating the different but related social consequences of the abstraction and promotion of the sense of sight—in both surveillance and spectacle—which have characterized the last two centuries.

In support of this view, Crary cites a passage from *The Society of the Spectacle*, which runs, in Crary's own translation, as follows: 'Since the spectacle's job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible [*saississable*] to be seen via different specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived [*mystifiable*], sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society's generalized abstraction.'³⁵ I have two immediate comments to make on this quotation, in relation to Louis XIV. First, the sense of sight was already paramount to Louis, who in fact could not be touched, except in the prescribed manner or at his own wish or command. Second, Louis used many different 'specialized mediations' in order to make his own image seen, as detailed most recently, for example, in Peter Burke's *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*.

Essentially, what we are dealing with when we use terms like 'surveillance' and 'spectacle' is the optical register of the administrative and the theatrical mentalities. The former seeks to gather the maximum information and, for this reason, to improve and elaborate the means and techniques of perception, particularly optical perception. As Louis noted, it is a centripetal system. The latter seeks to reach the maximum audience for a performance or an exhibition and, for this reason, to improve and elaborate the means of optical display. It is a centrifugal system. Louis XIV was committed to both types of system—both gathering information about others and distributing information about himself. In each case he made use of a variety of 'specialized mediations', such as official records and paid informers, on the one hand, and a profusion of medals, paintings, gazettes and so on, on the other. In the court, the two systems began to converge: courtiers were typically both informers and spectators.

³⁵ Debord, in Crary's translation, which should be read alongside the original French.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord differentiated between 'concentrated' and 'diffuse' forms of the modern social spectacle. Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany produced tightly controlled 'concentrated' forms of artistic and media spectacle, monopolizing the field of public display with government-controlled propaganda. In effect, these were 'post-absolutist' societies, which sprang up in the crisis caused by the collapse of the ancien regimes in Russia and Germany, the one based on a monopoly of state ownership, beyond Louis's wildest dreams, the other occupying the centre of political power while allowing a regulated, directed and protectionist form of capitalism, on more strictly Ludovican lines. Neither, however, depended on the existence of a Versailles. On the contrary, both Stalin and Hitler functioned much more like the despots from whom Louis differentiated himself. Stalin certainly ruled his Politburo and party barons by terror and Hitler's bloody disposal of Roehm provided the unspoken backdrop to Riefenstahl's spectacular *Triumph of the Will*. The 'diffuse' spectacle, on the other hand, typical of democratic regimes, in which the state can only influence—rather than control—the media, necessarily requires the development of forms of elite bonding.

Inside the Beltway

Like the king of France, the president of the United States seeks, through his Office of Communications, to produce and control a constant flow of favourable images.⁶⁶ Similarly, he receives a constant flow of sensitive intelligence. The major difference is that, as an elected monarch, he must seek to manipulate public opinion in ways that the god-ordained Louis would have found incredible. The president, like the king, sees himself as potential prey to a host of special interests [*intérêts particuliers*]⁶⁷—lobbies, Congress, press and so on, rather than great magnates, *parlements* or church. Within his court—'inside the Beltway', as it is known—the president actually prefers to use more direct means of contact—handshakes or telephone calls, for instance. But in order to command these rival centres of power, the president acts both by exerting pressure downwards, through his own authority and resources, and

⁶⁶ See John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control, The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*, Chapel Hill 1992.

⁶⁷ *Mémoires*.

also upwards, by influencing the media and manipulating public opinion in order to bring pressure to bear from beneath.

But perhaps the most interesting analogue to the court ballet is the 'Corporate Convention', which, as Judith Barry has pointed out, bears surprising resemblances to the Stuart masque, the English equivalent of the French court ballet.²⁸ Barry writes that:

this kind of production exists today, not in statecraft per se, but in the central controlling metaphor of life, that of corporate capitalism . . . This form of corporate spectacle is a relatively recent phenomenon developed over the last ten years and used increasingly to manage the non-tangible aspects of worker-relations in an increasingly white-collar work-force . . . The corporations have identified that these are personnel who need to be continually motivated . . . Furthermore, they realize that capitalism is built on intangibles and the deliberate manufacture of specific ideological systems. Consequently, they are looking for ways to foster company loyalty as well as lower absenteeism and boost productivity. In developing the idea of the corporate spectacle, they have, perhaps inadvertently, returned to the Renaissance model outlined above . . . Usually the president and his assistants participate directly in the spectacle as the stars or announcers; the overt message is nearly always masked, using entertainment, story-ideas and humour; and there is the use of elaborate and expensive special-effects to please the audience and add a 'specialness' to the occasion . . . It is not unusual for a multi-media presentation to be followed by a kind of variety show, complete with stars, but hosted by the president of the company.

The corporation is a closed group which maintains the hierarchical power structure elaborated within the absolutist bureaucracy. In this sense, it is like the army, with its parades and war-games (our tournaments) or the church, with its ornate rituals and theatrical ceremonies. These institutions exist within and alongside the structures of the state, but without involvement in its democratic forms. They are like islands of late feudalism which have survived into the twentieth century from the seventeenth when, indeed, they first took their historic form. For Guy Debord, the court was simply the ornamental feudal finery worn by the proto-bourgeois state bureaucracy which was the essence of Louis's regime. In fact, he was wrong. The court—the alliance of king and landed nobility—was the essence of absolutism. Bureaucracy was the secondary device which it passed on in different forms to

²⁸ Judith Barry, *Public Fantasy*, London 1991.

its successors—to western democracy, to fascism and to communism. Bureaucracy was the instrument of power rather than its agent.

Apollo's farewell

In effect, Foucault's book is about the mentality of bureaucracy. Hence its retrospective gaze back to the menagerie at Versailles, a symbol, in its way, of the bureaucratic vision which was first fully developed by Louis XIV. If there is a moment when we can see a point of transition, not from a society of the spectacle to one of surveillance, but from a pre-modern to a modern society, it is at some moment of mutation within Louis's reign. Commentators have chosen many different moments to exemplify this shift of mentality, this victory of the modern over the ancient. I agree with Jean-Marie Apostolides, who, in his book *Le Roi-machine*, identifies the crucial moment as that when Louis left the stage on the 7 February, Shrovetide 1670.²⁹ By removing his own body from view as centre of the spectacle, he transformed himself into the ghost in the machine, the abstract supervisor of the Panopticon and the subject of media representation rather than performance.

There are probably many reasons why Louis took this decision, not least the recurrent giddy spells from which he was suffering at the time, which his doctor dates and describes in the medical record.³⁰ But the effect, as we have seen, was to put an end to the ballet as an amateur endeavour and propel the spectacle as a professional form into the marketplace, thus establishing the conditions for 'diffuse' rather than 'concentrated' spectacle. In part, of course, this was because Louis, now bent on military conquest, was no longer willing to pay for it out of either personal or state funds. In part, as I have argued above, it was because his favourite musician Jean-Baptiste Lully (also a dancer) had finally convinced Louis that a French form of opera was viable and persuaded Louis to give him control over the new Academy entrusted with its presentation. Above all, perhaps, it was because Louis was preparing himself for the great series of disastrous wars which in due course destroyed the reforms and achievements of the sixties.³¹

²⁹ Jean-Marie Apostolides, *Le Roi-machine*, Paris 1981.

³⁰ *Journal de la Santé*.

³¹ See Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London 1984.

Apostolidès sees the ensuing Versailles period as a process of gradual petrification, whereby life was slowly drained from Louis's body into a dead machine.²² It is as if the legacy of Apollo himself was split into two—on the one hand, the patron of the arts, who presided over the dance of the Muses, and on the other, the celestial centre-point whose movements were entirely predictable, never halting or deviating for an instant, around whom his courtiers rotated in their prescribed paths.²³ Dance, on the other hand, was to enjoy its own history, tied in the form of ballet to the courts and nobility of Europe right up to the twentieth century, when reform finally came, internally from Diaghilev and his collaborators, externally from the counter-cultural modern dance of Isadora Duncan and her successors. Ballet, the body aesthetic, proved able to regain its energy and originality, to become, once again, an exemplary spectacle, albeit with a new and reformed corporeal regime. The monarchical absolute State, on the other hand, the body politic, which nurtured it, finally disappeared. Following Foucault, we might say, more prudently, that the body of the ant mutated into the bureaucratic ant-heap of modern society. No doubt the balletic grasshopper will still have to pay for its bodily pleasure in the end.

²² *Le Roi-machine*.

²³ On Louis XIV's mythological programme, see Jean-Pierre Néradau, *L'Olympe du Roi-Soleil*, Paris 1986; and, more generally, Peter N. Skrine, *The Baroque*, London 1978.

NANCY FRASER

RETHINKING RECOGNITION

IN THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES, struggles for the 'recognition of difference' seemed charged with emancipatory promise. Many who rallied to the banners of sexuality, gender, ethnicity and 'race' aspired not only to assert hitherto denied identities but to bring a richer, lateral dimension to battles over the redistribution of wealth and power as well. With the turn of the century, issues of recognition and identity have become even more central, yet many now bear a different charge: from Rwanda to the Balkans, questions of 'identity' have fuelled campaigns for ethnic cleansing and even genocide—as well as movements that have mobilized to resist them.

It is not just the character but the scale of these struggles that has changed. Claims for the recognition of difference now drive many of the world's social conflicts, from campaigns for national sovereignty and subnational autonomy, to battles around multiculturalism, to the newly energized movements for international human rights, which seek to promote both universal respect for shared humanity and esteem for cultural distinctiveness. They have also become predominant within social movements such as feminism, which had previously foregrounded the redistribution of resources. To be sure, such struggles cover a wide range of aspirations, from the patently emancipatory to the downright reprehensible (with most probably falling somewhere in between). Nevertheless, the recourse to a common grammar is worth considering. Why today, after the demise of Soviet-style communism and the acceleration of globalization, do so many conflicts take this form? Why do so many movements couch their claims in the idiom of recognition?

To pose this question is also to note the relative decline in claims for egalitarian redistribution. Once the hegemonic grammar of political contestation, the language of distribution is less salient today. The move-

ments that not long ago boldly demanded an equitable share of resources and wealth have not, to be sure, wholly disappeared. But thanks to the sustained neoliberal rhetorical assault on egalitarianism, to the absence of any credible model of 'feasible socialism' and to widespread doubts about the viability of state-Keynesian social democracy in the face of globalization, their role has been greatly reduced.

We are facing, then, a new constellation in the grammar of political claims-making—and one that is disturbing on two counts. First, this move from redistribution to recognition is occurring despite—or because of—an acceleration of economic globalization, at a time when an aggressively expanding capitalism is radically exacerbating economic inequality. In this context, questions of recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them. I shall call this *the problem of displacement*. Second, today's recognition struggles are occurring at a moment of hugely increasing transcultural interaction and communication, when accelerated migration and global media flows are hybridizing and pluralizing cultural forms. Yet the routes such struggles take often serve not to promote respectful interaction within increasingly multi-cultural contexts, but to drastically simplify and reify group identities. They tend, rather, to encourage separatism, intolerance and chauvinism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism. I shall call this *the problem of reification*.

Both problems—displacement and reification—are extremely serious: insofar as the politics of recognition displaces the politics of redistribution, it may actually promote economic inequality; insofar as it reifies group identities, it risks sanctioning violations of human rights and freezing the very antagonisms it purports to mediate. No wonder, then, that many have simply washed their hands of 'identity politics'—or proposed jettisoning cultural struggles altogether. For some, this may mean reprioritizing class over gender, sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity. For others, it means resurrecting economism. For others still, it may mean rejecting all 'minoritarian' claims out of hand and insisting upon assimilation to majority norms—in the name of secularism, universalism or republicanism.

Such reactions are understandable: they are also deeply misguided. Not all forms of recognition politics are equally pernicious: some represent

genuinely emancipatory responses to serious injustices that cannot be remedied by redistribution alone. Culture, moreover, is a legitimate, even necessary, terrain of struggle, a site of injustice in its own right and deeply imbricated with economic inequality. Properly conceived, struggles for recognition can aid the redistribution of power and wealth and can promote interaction and cooperation across gulfs of difference.

Everything depends on how recognition is approached. I want to argue here that we need a way of rethinking the politics of recognition in a way that can help to solve, or at least mitigate, the problems of displacement and reification. This means conceptualizing struggles for recognition so that they can be integrated with struggles for redistribution, rather than displacing and undermining them. It also means developing an account of recognition that can accommodate the full complexity of social identities, instead of one that promotes reification and separatism. Here, I propose such a rethinking of recognition.

The identity model

The usual approach to the politics of recognition—what I shall call the ‘identity model’—starts from the Hegelian idea that identity is constructed dialogically, through a process of mutual recognition. According to Hegel, recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects, in which each sees the other both as its equal and also as separate from it. This relation is constitutive for subjectivity: one becomes an individual subject only by virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject. Recognition from others is thus essential to the development of a sense of self. To be denied recognition—or to be ‘misrecognized’—is to suffer both a distortion of one’s relation to one’s self and an injury to one’s identity.

Proponents of the identity model transpose the Hegelian recognition schema onto the cultural and political terrain. They contend that to belong to a group that is devalued by the dominant culture is to be misrecognized, to suffer a distortion in one’s relation to one’s self. As a result of repeated encounters with the stigmatizing gaze of a culturally dominant other, the members of disesteemed groups internalize negative self-images and are prevented from developing a healthy cultural identity of their own. In this perspective, the politics of recognition aims to repair internal self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture’s

demeaning picture of the group. It proposes that members of misrecognized groups reject such images in favour of new self-representations of their own making, jettisoning internalized, negative identities and joining collectively to produce a self-affirming culture of their own—which, publicly asserted, will gain the respect and esteem of society at large. The result, when successful, is 'recognition': an undistorted relation to oneself.

Without doubt, this identity model contains some genuine insights into the psychological effects of racism, sexism, colonization and cultural imperialism. Yet it is theoretically and politically problematic. By equating the politics of recognition with identity politics, it encourages both the reification of group identities and the displacement of redistribution.

Displacing redistribution

Let us consider first the ways in which identity politics tend to displace struggles for redistribution. Largely silent on the subject of economic inequality, the identity model treats misrecognition as a free-standing cultural harm: many of its proponents simply ignore distributive injustice altogether and focus exclusively on efforts to change culture; others, in contrast, appreciate the seriousness of maldistribution and genuinely wish to redress it. Yet both currents end by displacing redistributive claims.

The first current casts misrecognition as a problem of cultural depreciation. The roots of injustice are located in demeaning representations, but these are not seen as socially grounded. For this current, the nub of the problem is free-floating discourses, not *institutionalized* significations and norms. Hypostatizing culture, they both abstract misrecognition from its institutional matrix and obscure its entwinement with distributive injustice. They may miss, for example, the links (institutionalized in labour markets) between androcentric norms that devalue activities coded as 'feminine', on the one hand, and the low wages of female workers on the other. Likewise, they overlook the links institutionalized within social-welfare systems between heterosexist norms which delegitimize homosexuality, on the one hand, and the denial of resources and benefits to gays and lesbians on the other. Obfuscating such connexions, they strip misrecognition of its social-structural underpinnings

and equate it with distorted identity. With the politics of recognition thus reduced to identity politics, the politics of redistribution is displaced.

A second current of identity politics does not simply ignore maldistribution in this way. It appreciates that cultural injustices are often linked to economic ones, but misunderstands the character of the links. Subscribing effectively to a 'culturalist' theory of contemporary society, proponents of this perspective suppose that maldistribution is merely a secondary effect of misrecognition. For them, economic inequalities are simple expressions of cultural hierarchies—thus, class oppression is a superstructural effect of the cultural devaluation of proletarian identity (or, as one says in the United States, of 'classism'). It follows from this view that all maldistribution can be remedied indirectly, by a politics of recognition: to revalue unjustly devalued identities is simultaneously to attack the deep sources of economic inequality; no explicit politics of redistribution is needed.

In this way, culturalist proponents of identity politics simply reverse the claims of an earlier form of vulgar Marxist economism: they allow the politics of recognition to displace the politics of redistribution, just as vulgar Marxism once allowed the politics of redistribution to displace the politics of recognition. In fact, vulgar culturalism is no more adequate for understanding contemporary society than vulgar economism was.

Granted, culturalism might make sense if one lived in a society in which there were no relatively autonomous markets, one in which cultural value patterns regulated not only the relations of recognition but those of distribution as well. In such a society, economic inequality and cultural hierarchy would be seamlessly fused; identity depreciation would translate perfectly and immediately into economic injustice, and misrecognition would directly entail maldistribution. Consequently, both forms of injustice could be remedied at a single stroke, and a politics of recognition that successfully redressed misrecognition would counter maldistribution as well. But the idea of a purely 'cultural' society with no economic relations—fascinating to generations of anthropologists—is far removed from the current reality, in which marketization has pervaded all societies to some degree, at least partially decoupling economic mechanisms of distribution from cultural patterns of value and prestige. Partially independent of such patterns, markets follow a logic of their own, neither wholly constrained by culture nor subordinated to it; as a

result they generate economic inequalities that are not mere expressions of identity hierarchies. Under these conditions, the idea that one could remedy all maldistribution by means of a politics of recognition is deeply deluded: its net result can only be to displace struggles for economic justice.

Reification of identity

Displacement, however, is not the only problem: the identity politics model of recognition tends also to reify identity. Stressing the need to elaborate and display an authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identity, it puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to a given group culture. Cultural dissidence and experimentation are accordingly discouraged, when they are not simply equated with disloyalty. So, too, is cultural criticism, including efforts to explore intragroup divisions, such as those of gender, sexuality and class. Thus, far from welcoming scrutiny of, for example, the patriarchal strands within a subordinated culture, the tendency of the identity model is to brand such critique as 'inauthentic'. The overall effect is to impose a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations. Ironically, then, the identity model serves as a vehicle for misrecognition: in reifying group identity, it ends by obscuring the politics of cultural identification, the struggles *within* the group for the authority—and the power—to represent it. By shielding such struggles from view, this approach masks the power of dominant fractions and reinforces intragroup domination. The identity model thus lends itself all too easily to repressive forms of communitarianism, promoting conformism, intolerance and patriarchalism.

Paradoxically, moreover, the identity model tends to deny its own Hegelian premisses. Having begun by assuming that identity is dialogical, constructed via interaction with another subject, it ends by valorizing monologism—supposing that misrecognized people can and should construct their identity on their own. It supposes, further, that a group has the right to be understood solely in its own terms—that no one is ever justified in viewing another subject from an external perspective or in dissenting from another's self-interpretation. But again, this runs counter to the dialogical view, making cultural identity an auto-generated auto-description, which one presents to others as an obiter

dictum. Seeking to exempt 'authentic' collective self-representations from all possible challenges in the public sphere, this sort of identity politics scarcely fosters social interaction across differences: on the contrary, it encourages separatism and group enclaves.

The identity model of recognition, then, is deeply flawed. Both theoretically deficient and politically problematic, it equates the politics of recognition with identity politics and, in doing so, encourages both the reification of group identities and the displacement of the politics of redistribution.

Misrecognition as status subordination

I shall consequently propose an alternative approach: that of treating recognition as a question of social status. From this perspective, what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination—in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. To redress this injustice still requires a politics of recognition, but in the 'status model' this is no longer reduced to a question of identity: rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest.

Let me explain. To view recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors as peers, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of reciprocal recognition and status equality. When, in contrast, they constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible—in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction—then we can speak of misrecognition and status subordination. From this perspective, misrecognition is neither a psychic deformation nor a free-standing cultural harm but an institutionalized relation of social subordination. To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence

of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem.

On the status model, moreover, misrecognition is not relayed through free-floating cultural representations or discourses. It is perpetrated, as we have seen, through institutionalized patterns—in other words, through the workings of social institutions that regulate interaction according to parity-impeding cultural norms. Examples might include marriage laws that exclude same-sex partnerships as illegitimate and perverse; social-welfare policies that stigmatize single mothers as sexually irresponsible scroungers; and policing practices, such as ‘racial profiling’, that associate racialized persons with criminality. In each of these cases, interaction is regulated by an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that constitutes some categories of social actors as normative and others as deficient or inferior: ‘straight’ is normal, ‘gay’ is perverse; ‘male-headed households’ are proper, ‘female-headed households’ are not; ‘whites’ are law-abiding, ‘blacks’ are dangerous. In each case, the result is to deny some members of society the status of full partners in interaction, capable of participating on a par with the rest.

As these examples suggest, misrecognition can assume a variety of forms. In today’s complex, differentiated societies, parity-impeding values are institutionalized at a plurality of institutional sites, and in qualitatively different modes. In some cases, misrecognition is juridified, expressly codified in formal law; in other cases, it is institutionalized via government policies, administrative codes or professional practice. It can also be institutionalized informally—in associational patterns, long-standing customs or sedimented social practices of civil society. But whatever the differences in form, the core of the injustice remains the same: in each case, an institutionalized pattern of cultural value constitutes some social actors as less than full members of society and prevents them from participating as peers.

On the status model, then, misrecognition constitutes a form of institutionalized subordination, and thus a serious violation of justice. Wherever and however it occurs, a claim for recognition is in order. But note precisely what this means: aimed not at valorizing group identity but rather at overcoming subordination, in this approach claims for recognition seek to establish the subordinated party as a full partner in social life, able to interact with others as a peer. They

aim, in other words, to de-institutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it. Redressing misrecognition now means changing social institutions—or, more specifically, changing the interaction-regulating values that impede parity of participation at all relevant institutional sites. Exactly how this should be done depends in each case on the mode in which misrecognition is institutionalized. Juridified forms require legal change, policy-entrenched forms require policy change, associational forms require associational change, and so on: the mode and agency of redress vary, as does the institutional site. But in every case, the goal is the same: redressing misrecognition means replacing institutionalized value patterns that impede parity of participation with ones that enable or foster it.

Consider again the case of marriage laws that deny participatory parity to gays and lesbians. As we saw, the root of the injustice is the institutionalization in law of a heterosexist pattern of cultural value that constitutes heterosexuals as normal and homosexuals as perverse. Redressing the injustice requires de-institutionalizing that value pattern and replacing it with an alternative that promotes parity. This, however, might be done in various ways: one way would be to grant the same recognition to gay and lesbian unions as heterosexual unions currently enjoy, by legalizing same-sex marriage; another would be to de-institutionalize heterosexual marriage, decoupling entitlements such as health insurance from marital status and assigning them on some other basis, such as citizenship. Although there may be good reasons for preferring one of these approaches to the other, in principle both of them would promote sexual parity and redress this instance of misrecognition.

In general, then, the status model is not committed *a priori* to any one type of remedy for misrecognition; rather, it allows for a range of possibilities, depending on what precisely the subordinated parties need in order to be able to participate as peers in social life. In some cases, they may need to be unburdened of excessive ascribed or constructed distinctiveness; in others, to have hitherto underacknowledged distinctiveness taken into account. In still other cases, they may need to shift the focus onto dominant or advantaged groups, outing the latter's distinctiveness, which has been falsely parading as universal; alternatively, they may need to deconstruct the very terms in which attributed differences are currently elaborated. In every case, the status model tailors the

remedy to the concrete arrangements that impede parity. Thus, unlike the identity model, it does not accord an *a priori* privilege to approaches that valorize group specificity. Rather, it allows in principle for what we might call universalist recognition, and deconstructive recognition, as well as for the affirmative recognition of difference. The crucial point, once again, is that on the status model the politics of recognition does not stop at identity but seeks institutional remedies for institutionalized harms. Focused on culture in its socially grounded (as opposed to free-floating) forms, *this* politics seeks to overcome status subordination by changing the values that regulate interaction, entrenching new value patterns that will promote parity of participation in social life.

Addressing maldistribution

There is a further important difference between the status and identity models. For the status model, institutionalized patterns of cultural value are not the only obstacles to participatory parity. On the contrary, equal participation is also impeded when some actors lack the necessary resources to interact with others as peers. In such cases, maldistribution constitutes an impediment to parity of participation in social life, and thus a form of social subordination and injustice. Unlike the identity model, then, the status model understands social justice as encompassing two analytically distinct dimensions: a dimension of recognition, which concerns the effects of institutionalized meanings and norms on the relative standing of social actors; and a dimension of distribution, which involves the allocation of disposable resources to social actors.¹

¹ Actually, I should say '*at least* two analytically distinct dimensions' in order to allow for the possibility of more. I have in mind specifically a possible third class of obstacles to participatory parity that could be called *political*, as opposed to economic or cultural. Such obstacles would include decision-making procedures that systematically marginalize some people even in the absence of maldistribution and misrecognition, for example, single-district winner-take-all electoral rules that deny voice to quasi-permanent minorities. (For an insightful account of this example, see Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Majority*, New York 1994). The possibility of a third class of political obstacles to participatory parity brings out the extent of my debt to Max Weber, especially to his 'Class, Status, Party', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds, Oxford 1958. In the present essay, I align a version of Weber's distinction between class and status with the distinction between distribution and recognition. Yet Weber's own distinction was tripartite not bipartite: 'class, status, and party'. Thus, he effectively prepared a

Thus, each dimension is associated with an analytically distinct aspect of social order. The recognition dimension corresponds to the status order of society, hence to the constitution, by socially entrenched patterns of cultural value, of culturally defined categories of social actors—status groups—each distinguished by the relative honour, prestige and esteem it enjoys vis-à-vis the others. The distributive dimension, in contrast, corresponds to the economic structure of society, hence to the constitution, by property regimes and labour markets, of economically defined categories of actors, or classes, distinguished by their differential endowments of resources.²

Each dimension, moreover, is associated with an analytically distinct form of injustice. For the recognition dimension, as we saw, the associated injustice is misrecognition. For the distributive dimension, in contrast, the corresponding injustice is maldistribution, in which economic structures, property regimes or labour markets deprive actors of the resources needed for full participation. Each dimension, finally, corresponds to an analytically distinct form of subordination: the recognition dimension corresponds, as we saw, to status subordination, rooted in institutionalized patterns of cultural value; the distributive dimension, in contrast, corresponds to economic subordination, rooted in structural features of the economic system.

In general, then, the status model situates the problem of recognition within a larger social frame. From this perspective, societies appear as

place for theorizing a third, political kind of obstacle to participatory parity, which might be called *political marginalization or exclusion*. I do not develop this possibility here, however, but confine myself to maldistribution and misrecognition, while leaving the analysis of political obstacles to participatory parity for another occasion.

² In this essay, I deliberately use a Weberian conception of class, not a Marxian one. Thus, I understand an actor's class position in terms of her or his relation to the market, not in terms of her or his relation to the means of production. This Weberian conception of class as an *economic* category suits my interest in distribution as a normative dimension of justice better than the Marxian conception of class as a *social* category. Nevertheless, I do not mean to reject the Marxian idea of the 'capitalist mode of production' as a social totality. On the contrary, I find that idea useful as an overarching frame within which one can situate Weberian understandings of both status and class. Thus, I reject the standard view of Marx and Weber as antithetical and irreconcilable thinkers. For the Weberian definition of class, see Max Weber, 'Class, Status, Party'.

complex fields that encompass not only cultural forms of social ordering but economic forms of ordering as well. In all societies, these two forms of ordering are interimbricated. Under capitalist conditions, however, neither is wholly reducible to the other. On the contrary, the economic dimension becomes relatively decoupled from the cultural dimension, as marketized arenas, in which strategic action predominates, are differentiated from non-marketized arenas, in which value-regulated interaction predominates. The result is a partial uncoupling of economic distribution from structures of prestige. In capitalist societies, therefore, cultural value patterns do not strictly dictate economic allocations (*contra* the culturalist theory of society), nor do economic class inequalities simply reflect status hierarchies; rather, maldistribution becomes partially uncoupled from misrecognition. For the status model, therefore, not all distributive injustice can be overcome by recognition alone. A politics of redistribution is also necessary.³

Nevertheless, distribution and recognition are not neatly separated from each other in capitalist societies. For the status model, the two dimensions are interimbricated and interact causally with each other. Economic issues such as income distribution have recognition subtexts: value patterns institutionalized in labour markets may privilege activities coded 'masculine', 'white' and so on over those coded 'feminine' and 'black'. Conversely, recognition issues—judgements of aesthetic value, for instance—have distributive subtexts: diminished access to economic resources may impede equal participation in the making of art.⁴ The result can be a vicious circle of subordination, as the status order and the economic structure interpenetrate and reinforce each other.

Unlike the identity model, then, the status model views misrecognition in the context of a broader understanding of contemporary society. From this perspective, status subordination cannot be understood in isolation

³ For fuller discussions of the mutual irreducibility of maldistribution and misrecognition, class and status in contemporary capitalist societies, see Nancy Fraser, 'Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler', *NLR* 17/228, March–April 1998, pp. 140–9; and 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation', in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, volume 19, ed. Grethe B. Peterson, Salt Lake City 1998, pp. 1–67.

⁴ For a comprehensive, if somewhat reductive, account of this issue, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Critique of Pure Taste*, tr. Richard Nice, Cambridge, MA 1984.

from economic arrangements, nor recognition abstracted from distribution. On the contrary, only by considering both dimensions together can one determine what is impeding participatory parity in any particular instance; only by teasing out the complex imbrications of status with economic class can one determine how best to redress the injustice. The status model thus works against tendencies to displace struggles for redistribution. Rejecting the view that misrecognition is a free-standing cultural harm, it understands that status subordination is often linked to distributive injustice. Unlike the culturalist theory of society, however, it avoids short-circuiting the complexity of these links: appreciating that not all economic injustice can be overcome by recognition alone, it advocates an approach that expressly integrates claims for recognition with claims for redistribution, and thus mitigates the problem of displacement.

The status model also avoids reifying group identities: as we saw, what requires recognition in this account is not group-specific identity but the status of individuals as full partners in social interaction. This orientation offers several advantages. By focusing on the effects of institutionalized norms on capacities for interaction, the model avoids hypostatizing culture and substituting identity-engineering for social change. Likewise, by refusing to privilege remedies for misrecognition that valorize existing group identities, it avoids essentializing current configurations and foreclosing historical change. Finally, by establishing participatory parity as a normative standard, the status model submits claims for recognition to democratic processes of public justification, thus avoiding the authoritarian monologism of the politics of authenticity and valorizing transcultural interaction, as opposed to separatism and group enclaves. Far from encouraging repressive communitarianism, then, the status model militates against it.

To sum up: today's struggles for recognition often assume the guise of identity politics. Aimed at countering demeaning cultural representations of subordinated groups, they abstract misrecognition from its institutional matrix and sever its links with political economy and, insofar as they propound 'authentic' collective identities, serve less to foster interaction across differences than to enforce separatism, conformism and intolerance. The results tend to be doubly unfortunate: in many cases, struggles for recognition simultaneously displace struggles for economic justice and promote repressive forms of communitarianism.

MALCOLM BULL

WHERE IS THE ANTI-NIETZSCHE?

OPPROSED TO EVERYONE, Nietzsche has met with remarkably little opposition. In fact, his reputation has suffered only one apparent reverse—his enthusiastic adoption by the Nazis. But, save in Germany, Nietzsche's association with the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust has served chiefly to stimulate further curiosity. Of course, the monster has had to be tamed, and Nietzsche's thought has been cleverly reconstructed so as perpetually to evade the evils perpetrated in his name. Even those philosophies for which he consistently reserved his most biting contempt—socialism, feminism and Christianity—have sought to appropriate their tormentor. Almost everybody now claims Nietzsche as one of their own; he has become what he most wanted to be—irresistible.

This situation gives added significance to a number of recent publications in which the authors reverse the standard practice and straightforwardly report what Nietzsche wrote in order to distance themselves from it. Ishay Landa's article, in which he persuasively argues against the idea that Nietzsche was anything other than dismissive of workers' rights, is one example.¹ But it is only the latest in a small flurry of books and articles that take a more critical view of Nietzsche's thought. The anti-Nietzschean turn began in France, where Luc Ferry and Alain Renant's collection, *Pourquoi nous ne sommes pas nietzschéens* (1991), responded to the Nietzsche/Marx/Freud syntheses of the preceding decades with the demand that 'We have to stop *interpreting* Nietzsche and start taking him at his word.'² The contributors emphasized Nietzsche's opposition to truth and rational argument, the disturbing consequences of his inegalitarianism and immoralism, and his influence on reac-

tionary thought. Ferry and Renant were seeking to renew a traditional humanism, but anti-Nietzscheanism can take very different forms. Geoff Waite's cornucopian *Nietzsche's Corps/e* (1996) links the end of Communism and the triumph of Nietzscheanism, and approaches Nietzsche and his body of interpreters from an Althusserian perspective from which Nietzsche emerges as 'the revolutionary programmer of late pseudo-leftist, fascoid-liberal culture and technoculture'.³ Claiming that, in that it is now 'blasphemy only to blaspheme Nietzsche—formerly the great blasphemer—and his community', Waite proceeds to uncover Nietzsche's 'esoteric' teachings which aim 'to re/produce a viable form of willing human slavery appropriate to post/modern conditions, and with it a small number of (male) geniuses equal only among themselves'.⁴ Integral to this teaching is what Waite calls the "hermeneutic" or "rhetoric of euthanasia": *the process of weeding out*. Those who cannot withstand the thought of Eternal Recurrence are, Nietzsche claims, unfit for life: 'Whosoever will be destroyed with the sentence "there is no salvation" ought to die. I want wars, in which the vital and courageous drive out the others.'⁵

Although Fredrick Appel's succinctly argued *Nietzsche Contra Democracy* (1999) could hardly be more different from *Nietzsche's Corps/e* in style, the argument is similar. Appel complains that as 'efforts to draft Nietzsche's thought into the service of radical democracy have multiplied . . . his patently inegalitarian political project [has been] ignored or summarily dismissed.' Far from being a protean thinker whose thought is so multifaceted as to resist any single political interpretation, Nietzsche is committed to 'an uncompromising repudiation of both the ethic of benevolence and the notion of the equality of persons in the name of a radically aristocratic commitment to human excellence.'⁶ Unlike Waite, who suggests that Nietzsche to some degree concealed his politi-

³ Ishay Landa, 'Nietzsche, the Chinese Worker's Friend', NLR 1/236, July–August 1999, pp. 3–23.

⁴ Alain Boyer, 'Hierarchy and Truth', in L. Ferry and A. Renaut, eds, *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, Chicago 1997, p. 2.

⁵ Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or, The Spectacular Technology of Everyday Life*, Durham, NC 1996, p. xi.

⁶ *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, p. 67 and p. 232.

⁷ F. Nietzsche quoted in *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, pp. 315–6.

⁸ Fredrick Appel, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, Ithaca 1999, p. 2.

cal agenda, Appel argues that it pervades every aspect of Nietzsche's later thought. Nietzsche's elitism is not only fundamental to his entire world-view, it is so profound that it leads naturally to the conclusion that 'the great majority of men have no right to existence'.⁷

Appel draws attention to Nietzsche's political programme not in order to exclude Nietzsche from the political debate but 'to invite democracy's friends to face the depth of his challenge head-on with a reasoned and effective defence of democratic ideals.'⁸ Appel himself gives no indication of what the appropriate defence might be. For Waite, who takes up Bataille's suggestion that 'Nietzsche's position is the only one outside of communism', the answer is clear: the only anti-Nietzschean position is a 'communist' one, vaguely defined as an assortment of social practices leading to total liberation.⁹ However, Waite does not say how or why such a position should be considered preferable. Nietzsche's arguments were explicitly formulated against the practices of social levelling and liberation found within Christianity, liberalism, socialism and feminism. Pointing out that Nietzsche's thought is incompatible with such projects is, as Appel rightly emphasizes, only the beginning.

But from where should Nietzsche be opposed? Most of his recent critics seek to reaffirm political and philosophical positions that Nietzsche himself repudiated. For them, reestablishing that Nietzsche was an amoral, irrationalist, anti-egalitarian who had no respect for basic human rights suffices as a means of disposing of his arguments. Yet if opposition comes only from within the pre-existing traditions, it will do little to dislodge Nietzsche from the position that he chose for himself—the philosopher of the future who writes 'for a species of man that does not yet exist'.¹⁰ The self-styled Anti-Christ who placed himself on the last day of Christianity, and at the end of the secular European culture that it had fostered, would not be displeased if his 'revaluation of all values' were to be indefinitely rejected by those who continued to adhere to the values he despised. He would live forever as their eschatological nem-

⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (hereafter WP), tr., W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York 1967, 872 (unless otherwise indicated, references to Nietzsche's works are to section numbers not page numbers).

⁸ *Contra Democracy*, p. 167.

⁹ *Nietzsche's Corps/e*, p. 70.

¹⁰ WP, 958.

esis, the limit-philosopher of a modernity that never ends, waiting to be born posthumously on the day after tomorrow. What seems to be missing is any critique of Nietzsche that takes the same retrospective position that Nietzsche adopted with regard to Christianity. Postmodernity has spawned plenty of post-Nietzscheans anxious to appropriate Nietzsche for their own agendas, but there appear to be no post-Nietzschean anti-Nietzscheans, no critics whose response is designed not to prevent us from getting to Nietzsche, but to enable us to get over him.

Reading Nietzsche

The chief impediment to the development of any form of anti-Nietzscheanism is, as Waite points out, that 'most readers basically *trust* him'.¹² One reason for this is that Nietzsche gives readers strong incentives to do so. 'This book belongs to the very few', he announces in the foreword to *The Anti-Christ*. It belongs only to those who are 'honest in intellectual matters to the point of harshness'; who have 'Strength which prefers questions for which no one today is sufficiently daring; courage for the *forbidden*':

These alone are my readers, my rightful readers, my predestined readers. what do the *rest* matter?—The rest are merely mankind.—One must be superior to mankind in force, in *loftiness* of soul—in contempt . . .¹³

Through the act of reading, Nietzsche flatteringly offers identification with the masters to anyone, but not to everyone. Identification with the masters means imaginative liberation from all the social, moral and economic constraints within which individuals are usually confined; identification with 'the rest' involves reading one's way through many pages of abuse directed at people like oneself. Unsurprisingly, people of all political persuasions and social positions have more readily discovered themselves to belong to the former category. For who, in the privacy of a reading, can fail to find within themselves some of those qualities of honesty and courage and loftiness of soul that Nietzsche describes?

¹² Nietzsche's *Corpus*/c, p. 24.

¹³ F. Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1968, Foreword.

As Wyndham Lewis observed, there is an element of fairground trickery in this strategy: 'Nietzsche, got up to represent a Polish nobleman, with a *berserker* wildness in his eye, advertised the secrets of the world, and sold little vials containing blue ink, which he represented as drops of authentic blue blood, to the delighted populace. They went away, swallowed his prescriptions, and felt very noble almost at once.'³ Put like this, it sounds as though Nietzsche's readers are simply credulous. But there is more to it. Take Stanley Rosen's account of the same phenomenon in Nietzsche-reception: 'An appeal to the highest, most gifted human individuals to create a radically new society of artist-warriors was expressed with rhetorical power and a unique mixture of frankness and ambiguity in such a way as to allow the mediocre, the foolish, and the mad to regard themselves as the divine prototypes of the highest men of the future.'⁴ How many of those who read this statement regard themselves as these 'divine prototypes'? Very few I suspect. For in uncovering Nietzsche's rhetorical strategy Rosen reuses it. The juxtaposition of 'the highest, most gifted human individuals' to whom Nietzsche addressed himself, and 'the mediocre, the foolish, and the mad' who claimed what was not rightfully theirs, encourages readers to distance themselves from the former category and identify with the 'gifted human individuals' who, it is implied, passed up the opportunity that Nietzsche offered. Like Lewis, Rosen invites his readers to consider the possibility that Nietzsche is only for the little people, and that being a mere Superman may well be beneath them.

Nietzsche's strategy is one from which it is difficult for readers wholly to disentangle themselves. And in *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game*, Daniel Conway argues that it is just this strategy that is central to Nietzsche's post-Zarathustra philosophy. Isolated, and seemingly ignored, the late Nietzsche desperately needs readers, for otherwise his grandiose claims about the epochal significance of his own philosophy cannot possibly be justified. But insofar as his readers passively accept his critique of earlier philosophy, they will hardly be the 'monsters of courage and curiosity' needed to transmit his philosophy to the future. However, if Nietzsche's readers actually embody those adventurous qualities he idealizes, they

³ Wyndham Lewis, *The Art of Being Ruled*, Santa Rosa, CA 1989, p. 113.

⁴ Stanley Rosen, *The Ancients and the Moderns*, New Haven 1989, p. 190.

will quickly detect 'his own complicity in the decadence of modernity'.¹⁵ Paradoxically, therefore, Nietzscheanism is best preserved through readings which expose Nietzsche's decadence and so make him the first martyr to his own strategy. Indeed, Conway's own practice of 'reading Nietzsche against Nietzsche' is, as he acknowledges, one example, and so, according to his own argument, ironically serves to perpetuate a Nietzscheanism without Nietzsche: 'the apostasy of his children is never complete. They may turn on him, denounce him, even profane his teachings, but they do so only by implementing the insights and strategies he has bequeathed to them.'¹⁶ As a result, one aspect of Nietzsche's programme, his suspicion, is forever enacted against another, his critique of decadence, for the suspicion that unmasks the decadence even of the 'master of suspicion' is itself a symptom of decadence waiting to be unmasked by future generations themselves schooled in suspicion by their own decadence.

Although Conway illustrates ways in which both Nietzsche and his 'signature doctrines' are potentially the victims of his own strategy, he does little to show how the reader can avoid participating in it. In fact, Conway appears to be deploying a more sophisticated version of the Nietzschean response used by Lewis and Rosen. Rather than simply inviting the reader to think of themselves as being superior to the foolish mediocrities who would be Supermen, Conway encourages the reader to join him in the higher task of unmasking the Supermen, and Nietzsche himself. But is there no way to reject Nietzsche without at the same time demonstrating one's masterly superiority to the herd of slavish Nietzscheans from whom one is distinguishing oneself? Can the reader resist, or at least fail to follow, Nietzsche's injunction: 'one must be superior . . .'?

Reading for victory

The act of reading always engages the emotions of readers, and to a large degree the success of any text (or act of reading) depends upon a reader's sympathetic involvement. A significant part of that involvement comes from the reader's identification with individuals or types

¹⁵ Daniel Conway, *Nietzsche's Dangerous Game: Philosophy in the Twilight of the Idols*, Cambridge 1997, p. 152.

¹⁶ *Dangerous Game*, p. 256.

within the story. People routinely identify with the heroes of narratives, and with almost any character who is presented in an attractive light. This involves 'adopting the goals of a protagonist' to the extent that the success or failure of those goals occasions an emotional response in the reader similar to that which might be expected of the protagonist, irrespective of whether the protagonist is actually described as experiencing those emotions.⁷ Hence, a story with a happy ending is one in which the reader feels happy because of the hero's success, and a sad story is one in which the protagonist is unsuccessful.

Within this process, readers sometimes identify with the goals of characters who may be in many or all external respects (age, race, gender, class etc.) dissimilar to themselves. But the goals with which they identify—escaping death, finding a mate, achieving personal fulfilment—are almost always ones shared by the reader in that they reflect rational self-interest. The effect of identifying with the goals of protagonists on the basis of self-interest is that the act of reading becomes an attempt to succeed in the same objectives that the reader pursues in everyday life. Indeed, success in the act of reading may actually serve to compensate the reader for their relative inability to realize those same objectives in their own lives. Hence perhaps the apparent paradox generated by Nietzsche's popularity amongst disadvantaged groups he went out of his way to denigrate. They, too, are reading for victory, struggling to wrest success from the text by making themselves the heroes of Nietzsche's narrative.

Reading for victory is the way Nietzsche himself thought people ought to read. As he noted in *Human, All Too Human*:

Whoever wants really to get to *know* something new (be it a person, an event, or a book) does well to take up this new thing with all possible love, to avert his eye quickly from, even to forget, everything about it that he finds

⁷ See Keith Oatley, 'A taxonomy of the emotions in literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative', *Poetics*, 23, 1994, pp. 53–74; D. W. Allbritton and R. J. Gerrig found that readers have positive preferences for the outcomes of narratives, and that having negative preferences (e.g. hoping that the protagonist misses a flight) is so unusual that when readers are manipulated into preferring a negative outcome (e.g. by being told that the plane will crash) they are less able to remember the actual outcome; see their 'Participatory Responses in Text Understanding', *Journal of Memory and Language*, 30, 1991, pp. 603–26.

mimical, objectionable, or false. So, for example, we give the author of a book the greatest possible head start, and, as if in a race, virtually yearn with pounding heart for him to reach his goal.¹⁸

When he wrote this, Nietzsche considered that reading for victory was only a device and that reason might eventually catch up. But in his later writings, this possibility is dismissed. Knowledge 'works as a tool of power' and so 'increases with every increase of power'.¹⁹ The reader's yearning for victory is now not a means to knowledge but an example of what knowledge is. Getting to know something is no more than the act of interpreting it to one's own advantage: 'The will to power *interprets* . . . In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something.'²⁰

In this context, reading for victory without regard to the objections or consequences of that reading is more than reading the way we usually read: it is also our first intoxicating taste of the will to power. Not only does reading for victory exemplify the will to power, but in reading Nietzsche our exercise of the will to power is actually rewarded with the experience of power. It is possible to see this happen even in a single sentence. Take Nietzsche's boast in *Ecce Homo*, 'I am not a man I am dynamite.'²¹ Reading these words, who has not felt the sudden thrill of something explosive within themselves; or, at the very least, emboldened by Nietzsche's daring, allowed themselves to feel a little more expansive than usual? This, after all, is the way we usually read! Even though Nietzsche is attributing the explosive power to himself, not to us, we instantly appropriate it for ourselves.

Here perhaps is the root of Nietzsche's extraordinary bond with his readers. Reading Nietzsche successfully means reading for victory, reading so that we identify ourselves with the goals of the author. In so unscrupulously seeking for ourselves the rewards of the text we become exemplars of the uninhibited will to power. No wonder Nietzsche can so confidently identify his readers with the Supermen. It is not just flattery. If Nietzsche's readers have mastered his text, they have demonstrated just those qualities of ruthlessness and ambition that qualify

¹⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, tr. M. Faber, Harmondsworth 1984, 621.

¹⁹ WP, 480.

²⁰ WP, 643.

²¹ F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1979, p. 126.

them to be 'masters of the earth'. But they have done more than earn a status in Nietzsche's fictional world. In arriving at an understanding of Nietzsche's cardinal doctrine they have already proved it to themselves. Nietzsche persuades by appealing to experience—not to our experience of the world, but our experience as readers, in particular our experience as readers of his text.

Reading like a loser

There is an alternative to reading for victory: reading like a loser. Robert Burton described it and its consequences in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*:

Yea, but this meditation is that marres all, and mistaken makes many men farre worse, misconceaving all they reade or heare, to their owne overthrow, the more they search and reade Scriptures, or divine Treatises, the more they puzzle themselves, as a bird in a net, the more they are intangled and precipitated into this preposterous gulfe. *Many are called, but few are chosen*, Mat. 20.16 and 22.14. With such like places of Scripture misinterpreted strike them with horror, they doubt presently whether they be of this number or no, gods eternall decree of predestination, absolute reprobation, & such fatall tables they forme to their owne ruine, and impinge upon this rocke of despaire.²²

Reading to one's own overthrow, to convict oneself from the text is an unusual strategy. It differs equally from the rejection of a text as mistaken or immoral and from the assimilation of a text as compatible with one's own being. Reading like a loser means assimilating a text in such a way that it is incompatible with one's self.

The interpretative challenge presented by the doctrine of predestination is in important respects similar to the one Nietzsche offers his readers. The underlying presupposition of both is that many are called, and few are chosen. One might suppose that the majority of those faced with the doctrine would deduce that they are more likely to be amongst the many than the few. But, just as almost all of Nietzsche's readers identify themselves as being amongst the few who are honest, strong and courageous, so generations of Christians have discovered themselves to be amongst the few who are 'called'. The alternative, although seemingly logical, was

²² Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Oxford 1989, vol. 3, p. 434.

so rare as to be considered pathological. People were not expected to survive in this state. As Burton noted: 'Never was any living creature in such torment . . . in such miserable estate, in such distresse of minde, no hope, no faith, past cure, reprobate, continually tempted to make away with themselves.'²³

Reading like losers, we respond very differently to the claims Nietzsche makes on behalf of himself and his readers. Rather than reading for victory with Nietzsche, or even reading for victory against Nietzsche by identifying with the slave morality, we read for victory against ourselves, making ourselves the victims of the text. Doing so does not involve treating the text with scepticism or suspicion. In order to read like a loser you have to accept the argument, but turn its consequences against yourself. So, rather than thinking of ourselves as dynamite, or questioning Nietzsche's extravagant claim, we will immediately think (as we might if someone said this to us in real life) that there may be an explosion; that we might get hurt; that we are too close to someone who could harm us. Reading like losers will make us feel powerless and vulnerable.

The net result, of course, is that reading Nietzsche will become far less pleasurable. When we read that 'Those who are from the outset victims, downtrodden, broken—they are the ones, the weakest are the ones who most undermine life'²⁴ we will think primarily of ourselves. Rather than being an exhilarating vision of the limitless possibilities of human emancipation, Nietzsche's texts will continually remind us of our own weakness and mediocrity, and our irremediable exclusion from the life of joy and careless laughter that is possible only for those who are healthier and more powerful. In consequence, we will never experience the mysterious alchemy of Nietzsche's texts in which the reader reaps the benefits of Nietzsche's doctrine in the act of apprehending it.

How then will we feel about Nietzsche? We might answer the way Nietzsche suggests no one has ever answered: "I don't like him."—Why?—"I am not equal to him."²⁵ In any case, we will not be able to look

²³ *Anatomy*, p. 422.

²⁴ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, tr. D. Smith, Oxford 1996, 3.14.

²⁵ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr. W. Kaufmann, New York 1966, 185.

him in the face as he asks us to do.²⁶ His gaze is too piercing, his presence too powerful. We must lower our eyes and turn away.

The philistine

Reading Nietzsche like losers is likely to prove more difficult than we might suppose. It involves more than distancing ourselves from his more extravagant claims; it means that we will find it impossible to identify with any of his positive values. This may prove painful, for some of Nietzsche's values are widely endorsed within contemporary culture, and accepting our inability to share them may count as an intellectual and social failing. This is perhaps most obviously true when it comes to art, the one thing to which Nietzsche consistently ascribed a positive value.

It was in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche first articulated the view that life was meaningless and unbearable, and that 'it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified.'²⁷ Although he subsequently distanced himself from this early work, Nietzsche never gave up the idea that art was the one redemptive value in the world, or that 'we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art.'²⁸ In his later writings, the role of art comes to be identified with the will to power. As Nietzsche wrote in a draft for the new preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*:

Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life.

Art as the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life, as that which is anti-Christian, anti-Buddhist, antimoralist *par excellence*.²⁹

Whereas other putative sources of value, such as religion and morality and philosophical truth, placed themselves in opposition to life, art was not something that stood over and against life, it was the affirmation of life, and so also life's affirmation of itself.

²⁶ *Anti-Christ*, I.

²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. W. Kaufmann, New York 1967, 5; see also *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufmann, New York 1974, 107.

²⁸ *Birth of Tragedy*, 5. ²⁹ WP, 853.

Nietzsche's later vision of art as the value that supersedes all others has two related elements: the role of the aesthetic as a source of value, and the artist as a creator and embodiment of that value. But if we are reading like losers, we are not going to be able to identify with either of these things. We will think of ourselves as philistines who are unable to appreciate what is supposedly the aesthetic dimension of experience; as people who have no taste or discrimination, no capacity to appreciate what are meant to be the finer things of life. This does not just involve distancing ourselves from the rarified discourse of traditional aesthetics; it means not being able to see the point of avant-gardist repudiations of tradition either.

According to Nietzsche, 'the effect of works of art is to *excite the state that creates art*'. Being an aesthete is therefore indistinguishable from being an artist, for 'All art . . . speaks only to artists.'³⁰ Reading like losers places us outside this equation: unable to appreciate, we are also unable to create. We cannot think of ourselves as original or creative people, or as makers of things that add to the beauty or aesthetic variety of the world. When we read Nietzsche's descriptions of the 'inartistic state' that subsists 'among those who become impoverished, withdraw, grow pale, under whose eyes life suffers',³¹ we should not hurry to exclude ourselves. In Nietzsche's opinion, '*the aesthetic state* . . . appears only in natures capable of that bestowing and overflowing fullness of bodily vigor . . . [But] The sober, the weary, the exhausted, the dried-up (e.g. scholars) can receive absolutely nothing from art, because they do not possess the primary artistic force.'³² 'Yes,' the loser responds, 'that sounds like me.'

It may not appear to be a very attractive option, for Nietzsche deliberately makes it as unappealing as possible, but acknowledging a lack of 'the primary artistic force' must be the starting point for any anti-Nietzscheanism. Anyone who does not do so retains an important stake in Nietzsche's vision of the future. Receptivity to the aesthetic is the ticket to privilege in Nietzsche's world; the only people liable to suffer from his revaluation of values are those who lack it. Nietzsche may claim that only a select minority are likely to qualify, but in a culture where self-identified philistines are conspicuous by their absence, it is not surprising to discover that Nietzsche's readers have consistently

³⁰ WP, 809 and 821.

³¹ WP, 812.

³² WP, 801.

found themselves to be included rather than excluded from his vision of the future.

The subhuman

To find the Anti-Nietzsche it is necessary not only to locate oneself outside contemporary culture, but outside the human species altogether. Nietzsche's model for the future of intra-specific relations is based on that of inter-specific relations in the natural world. The underlying analogy is that Superman is to man, as man is to animal. Zarathustra pictures man as 'a rope stretched between animal and Superman—a rope over an abyss.'³³ The philosopher of the future must walk the tightrope. Unlike those who would rather return to the animal state, the Supermen will establish the same distance between themselves and other humans, as humans have established between themselves and animals:

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves, and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide and return to the animals rather than overcome man?

What is the ape to men? A laughing stock or a painful embarrassment. And just so shall man be to the Superman: a laughing stock or a painful embarrassment.³⁴

Indeed, Nietzsche repeatedly refers to Supermen as being a different species: 'I write for a species of man that does not yet exist: for the "masters of the earth".'³⁵ He was not speaking metaphorically, either. He hoped that the new species might be created through selective breeding, and noted the practical possibility of 'international racial unions whose task will be to rear the master race, the future "masters of the earth".'³⁶

According to Nietzsche, it follows from this that, relative to the Supermen, ordinary mortals will have no rights whatsoever. The Supermen have duties only to their equals, 'towards the others one acts as one thinks best.'³⁷ The argument here is also based on inter-specific analogies. Nietzsche conceives the difference between man and Superman not only in terms of that between animal and man, but on

³³ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1969, p. 43.

³⁴ *Zarathustra*, p. 41.

³⁵ WP, 958.

³⁶ WP, 960.

³⁷ WP, 943.

the model of herd animal and predatory animal. He first introduced the idea in *The Genealogy of Morals*, in a discussion of lambs and birds of prey. Noting that it is hardly strange that lambs bear ill will towards large birds of prey, he argues this is 'in itself no reason to blame large birds of prey for making off with little lambs.' According to Nietzsche, to do so would be

To demand of strength that it should *not* express itself as strength, that it should *not* be a will to overcome, overthrow, dominate, a thirst for enemies and resistance and triumph, makes as little sense as to demand of weakness that it should express itself as strength.

The argument hinges on the idea of carnivorousness as an expression of the amorality that is a natural and inescapable feature of interspecific relations. Nietzsche imagines his birds of prey saying 'We bear them no ill will at all, these good lambs—indeed, we love them; there is nothing tastier than a tender lamb.'⁸ However it may appear to the lambs, for the carnivore eating them it is not a question of ethics, just a matter of taste. Nietzsche therefore argues that were a comparable divide to exist between two human species, the Supermen and the herd animals who sustain them, relations between the species would also be entirely governed by the tastes of the superior species. Nietzsche does not say whether the Supermen will feast upon their human subordinates, but it is inconceivable that he should have any objection to the practice, save perhaps gastronomic.

Why do not Nietzsche's readers experience the visceral fear of the Superman that Nietzsche attributes to the lambs? The answer is surely that the reader immediately identifies with the human rather than the animal, and with the carnivore rather than the herbivore. Nietzsche's argument relies on the assumption that the patterns of interspecific relations are unquestioned and that it will be easier for the reader to imagine eating other species than it is to imagine being eaten by them. The raptors' response to the lamb is therefore also that of carnivorous readers, who also love lamb as much as they love lambs. Reading like losers, however, we may see things rather differently. We will not just identify with man rather than Superman, but also with the animal rather than man, and with the herd animal rather than the predator. The pattern of

⁸ *Genealogy*, I, 13.

interspecific behaviour that Nietzsche describes will immediately strike us as terrifying—an all-out war against the defenceless explicable only in terms of the hatred of the predator for the prey.

Once again, the difficulty of reading like losers is extreme. First, rather than dismissing Nietzsche's suggestion that intrahuman diversity could ever produce distinct species of men and Supermen, we have to accept the idea that interspecific analogues are relevant. Second, we have to relocate ourselves within those analogues in the position of the subhuman rather than the human, as ape to man, herbivore to carnivore. This means divesting ourselves of all our assumptions about species superiority and imagining our experience of the human species to be that of a subhuman species. Consistently thinking about the human from the perspective of the subhuman is difficult, but in reading like a loser we have to give up the idea of becoming more than man and think only of becoming something less.

Nietzsche himself identified becoming subhuman with the egalitarian projects of democracy and socialism:

The *over-all degeneration of man* down to what today appears to the socialist dolts and flatheads as their 'man of the future'—as their ideal—this degeneration and diminution of man into the perfect herd animal (or, as they say, to the man of the 'free society'), this animalization of man into the dwarf animal of equal rights and claims, is *possible*, there is no doubt of it.

The prospect strikes Nietzsche with horror: 'Anyone who has once thought through this possibility to the end knows one kind of nausea that other men don't know.'⁹⁹ Even those who consider Nietzsche to have offered an absurd caricature of the socialist project would probably agree that the subhumanization of man was a repulsive goal. But if we are reading like losers we may think differently. Just as the superhumanization of man will fill us with terror, the dehumanization of man into a herd animal will strike us as offering a welcome respite from a cruel predator, and opening up new possibilities for subhuman sociality. And although the subhuman, like the philistine, may not seem like the most promising basis for a thoroughgoing anti-Nietzscheanism, it is more than just a hypothetical counter-Nietzschean position generated

⁹⁹ *Beyond Good and Evil*, 203.

by a perverse strategy of reading: the subhuman and the philistine are not two forms of the Anti-Nietzsche but one.

Negative ecology of value

Nietzsche's project is the revaluation of all values. There are two stages: the first nihilistic, the second ecological. Nietzsche acknowledged himself to be 'a thorough-going nihilist', and although he says he accepted this only in the late 1880s, the idea obviously appealed, for he then proclaimed himself to be 'the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself.'⁴⁰ What Nietzsche means is that he has accepted, more completely than anyone before him, the 'absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes.'⁴¹ All the values of religion and morality which were supposed to make life worth living are unsustainable; scepticism has undermined the lot. The truthfulness enjoined by religion and morality has shown the values of religion and morality (including the value of truth itself) to be fictitious. In this way, the highest values of the past have devalued themselves. Nihilism is not something that has worked against religion and morality, it has worked through them. The advent of nihilism, the realization that everything that was thought to be of value is valueless, therefore represents both the triumph of Christian values and their annihilation. As Heidegger observed, 'for Nietzsche, nihilism is not in any way simply a phenomenon of decay; rather nihilism is, as the fundamental event of Western history, simultaneously and above all the intrinsic law of that history.'⁴²

Although Nietzsche does not repudiate nihilism, he anticipates that in the future it will take another form. He argues that 'the universe seems to have lost value, seems "meaningless"—but that is only a *transitional stage*.'⁴³ What lies beyond it is 'a movement that in some future will take the place of this perfect nihilism—but presupposes it, logically and psychologically'.⁴⁴ The movement is the one that Nietzsche describes as the revaluation of all values. The presupposition of this is that 'we

⁴⁰ WP, Prologue, 2.

⁴¹ WP, 3.

⁴² M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, New York 1977, p. 67.

⁴³ WP, 7.

⁴⁴ WP, Prologue, 2.

require, sometime, *new values*', but not values of the old kind that measure the value of the world in terms of things outside it, for they 'refer to a purely fictitious world'.⁴⁵ Nietzsche's revaluation of values demands more than this, 'an overturning of the nature and manner of valuing'.⁴⁶

Nietzsche does not use the word, but the form of this revaluation of valuing is perhaps most accurately described as ecological, not because Nietzsche exhibited any particular concern for the natural environment, but on account of the unprecedented conjunction of two ideas: the recognition of the interdependence of values, and the evaluation of value in biological terms. As a pioneer in the study of the history of values, Nietzsche sought 'knowledge of their growth, development, displacement'.⁴⁷ Values did not co-exist in an unchanging timeless harmony. Within history some values had displaced others because not all values can simultaneously be equally valuable. Some values negate and devalue others: Christianity had involved 'a revaluation of all the values of antiquity', for the ancient values, 'pride . . . the deification of passion, of revenge, of cunning, of anger, of voluptuousness, of adventure, of knowledge', could not prosper in the new moral climate.⁴⁸ And the same could happen again: 'Moral values have hitherto been the highest values: would anybody call this in question?—If we remove these values from this position, we alter all values: the principle of their order of rank hitherto is thus overthrown.'⁴⁹ In consequence, the revaluation of values involves not the invention of new values, but reinventing the relationships between the old ones: 'The future task of the philosopher: this task being understood as the solution of the *problem of value*, [is] the determination of the *hierarchy of values*.'⁵⁰

If it was as a genealogist of values that Nietzsche discovered their precarious ecology, it was as a nihilist that he sought to exploit it. Nietzsche recognized that, just as asserting one value negated another, so the denial of value placed a positive valuation upon the negation itself. The one irreducible value was therefore the value of valuation. But since, for a nihilist, values are valueless in themselves, the value of valuation is not merely the last value but the only one. As Nietzsche states, nihilism

⁴⁵ WP, 12B.

⁴⁶ *Genealogy*, Preface, 6.

⁴⁷ WP, 1006.

⁴⁸ *Concerning Tautology*, p. 70.

⁴⁹ WP, 221.

⁵⁰ *Genealogy*, I.17.

'places the value of things precisely in the lack of any reality corresponding to these values and in their being merely a symptom of strength on the part of the value-positer.'² The effect of this argument is heavily reductive, for if the only value is valuation, then all that is of value is the capacity to establish values, a capacity that Nietzsche equates with life itself: 'When we speak of values we do so under the inspiration and from the perspective of life: life itself evaluates through us *when* we establish values.'³ However, life itself is contested, and so 'There is nothing to life that has value except the degree of power—assuming that life itself is the will to power.'⁴

As a historian, Nietzsche noted that 'Values and their changes are related to increases in the power of those positing the values',⁵ but, according to his own reductive argument, changes in value are not merely related to changes in power, they are themselves those changes in power, for the only value is 'the highest quantum of power that a man is able to incorporate.'⁶ So, because value resides in valuation, and valuation exists only where there is the power to establish values, the ecology of value within the realm of ideas becomes a literal biological ecology of living organisms. As Nietzsche puts it

The standpoint of 'value' is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming.⁷

In short, value is ultimately ecological, in that what is of value is the conditions that allow valuation. And since, according to Nietzsche, 'it is the intrinsic right of *masters* to create values',⁸ it follows that "Value" is essentially the standpoint for the increase or decrease of these dominating centres.'⁹ The future task of the philosopher is therefore that of establishing not so much a hierarchy of value, or even a hierarchy of value-positer, as that of creating an ecology in which valuation is possible. Not being familiar with the twentieth-century concept of the ecologist, Nietzsche imagines a new type of physician whose concern is with the health of society as a whole:

² WP, 13.

³ F Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1968, V 5 (p. 45).

⁴ WP, 55.

⁵ WP, 14.

⁶ WP, 714.

⁷ WP, 715.

⁸ BGE, 261.

⁹ WP, 715.

I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of that word—one who has to pursue the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of humanity—to muster the courage to push my suspicion to its limits and to risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but something else—let us say, health, future, growth, power, life.⁵⁹

What this global ecologist of value would do is create conditions that foster the production of value-positors. And since the 'higher type is possible only through the subjugation of the lower',⁶⁰ this means breeding a master species capable of enslaving the rest of the world:

a new, tremendous aristocracy, based on the severest self-legislation, in which the will of philosophical men of power and artist-tyrants will be made to endure for millennia—a higher kind of man who . . . employ democratic Europe as their most pliant and supple instrument for getting hold of the destinies of the earth, so as to work as artists upon 'man' himself.⁶¹

In this ecology, the philistine and the subhuman are the same thing. Nietzsche equates receptivity to the aesthetic with being an artist, being an artist with the capacity for valuation, and the capacity for valuation with the exercise of power. Just as his artist-tyrants display their artistry through their tyranny and exercise their tyranny in their artistry, so philistinism is the mark of the subhuman, and subhumanization the fate of the philistine. Because they fail to participate in art, the '*affirmation, blessing, deification, of existence*',⁶² philistines lack will to power, and are enslaved. And because subhumans lack the power to create value, they can never appreciate it either. Within the ecology of value a certain number of subhuman-philistines are always necessary in order to act as slaves to the supermen-aesthetes, but since an ecology of value is one that fosters the production of supermen-aesthetes rather than subhuman-philistines it follows that any increase in the latter, beyond the minimum needed to serve the needs of their masters, will have a negative effect on that ecology. Nietzsche's vision of the future naturally includes provision for the extermination of these vermin, for their proliferation will do more than have a negative effect on his ecology of value; since the ecology of value is the last remaining value in the history of nihilism, its negation is the ultimate negation of value itself.

⁵⁹ *Gay Science*, 35.

⁶⁰ WP, 660.

⁶¹ WP, 960.

⁶² WP, 821.

It is worth considering the implications of this a little further. For a thorough-going nihilist the last value must be derived from the negation of value. Since valuation is unavoidable, it would seem to follow that valuation is that last value. And this is why Nietzsche thinks that the ecology of value will be the ultimate conclusion of his nihilism. But this is not so. Although value might ultimately be ecological, it does not follow that its ecology is valuable. Rather than a positive ecology of value, which creates the possibility for conditions of valuation, there might be a negative ecology. The nihilistic impulse might turn against this last redoubt of value, arguing that the last value must be the negation of the conditions of valuation, an ecology which minimizes the possibilities for the positing of value and so reduces the quantum of value still further. On this view, the last value would not be an ecology of value but a negative ecology of value. The full significance of the philistine and the subhuman now becomes clearer. Reading Nietzsche as a philistine-subhuman is not just a matter of finding a perspective from which Nietzsche's ideas appear alien and threatening, it actually constitutes a countermove to Nietzsche's strategy. Reading for victory exemplifies the will to power and promotes an ecology of value by increasing the numbers of those who are value-positors; reading like a loser has a direct negative impact on that ecology since it decreases the proportion of value-positors. Taking up the role of the philistine-subhuman therefore continues the nihilistic dynamic that Nietzsche thought he had ended, not by perpetuating the *ressentiment* of slave-morality—reading like a loser is not an affirmation of the values through which losers become winners—but by having a direct, negative impact on the ecology of value.

Total society

It might appear that a negative ecology of value could feature on only the most perverse of dystopian agendas. But that would be a hasty judgement. The negative ecology of value, which Nietzsche called 'the kingdom of heaven of the poor in spirit', had in his view already begun:

The French Revolution as the continuation of Christianity. Rousseau is the seducer. he again unfetters woman who is henceforth represented in an ever more interesting manner—as suffering. Then the slaves and Mrs. Beecher-Stowe. Then the poor and the workers. Then the vice addicts and the sick . . . We are well on the way the kingdom of heaven of the poor in spirit has begun.⁶¹

The way in which this process served to negate value is spelt out most clearly with regard to slavery: "Abolition of slavery"—supposedly a tribute to "human dignity", in fact a destruction of a fundamentally different type (—the undermining of its values and happiness—).⁶⁴ Rather than accepting the rhetoric of liberation on its own terms, and seeing it as an extension of the ecology of value which attributes positive qualities to those who are liberated, Nietzsche sees it only as a negation of the values reposed within the masters. Thus, the liberation of women serves only to negate the special value of masculinity; the emancipation of slaves the value of whiteness, the liberation of the workers the value of capital, the liberation of the sick the seemingly unarguable value of health itself.

Those who seek to oppose Nietzsche typically reject his analysis of these changes and maintain that the long process of human emancipation has not only been motivated by the desire to promote values but has also contributed to their ecology. But, as has often been noted, this argument is difficult to sustain at a historical or sociological level. Whatever the intentions of those who have promoted these social reforms, their effect has not been to strengthen value, but rather to dilute it by widening its scope. Durkheim, writing shortly after Nietzsche, was perhaps the first to note the pattern. Laws against murder are now more inclusive than in former times, but

If all the individuals who . . . make up society are today protected to an equal extent, this greater mildness in morality is due, not to the emergence of a penal rule that is really new, but to the extension of the scope of an ancient rule. From the beginning there was a prohibition on attempts to take the life of any member of the group, but children and slaves were excluded from this category. Now that we no longer make such distinctions actions have become punishable that once were not criminal. But this is merely because there are more persons in society, and not because collective sentiments have increased in number. These have not grown, but the object to which they relate has done so.⁶⁵

Indeed, as he argued in *The Division of Labour in Society*, the *conscience collective*, the set of values shared by a social group, is progressively weakened by increases in the size and complexity of the unit. Taken to its

⁶⁴ WP, 94.

⁶⁵ WP, 315.

⁶⁶ E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*, tr. W. D. Halls, London 1984, p. 117.

limits, the dynamic that Durkheim describes involves the totalization of society to its maximal inclusiveness and complexity, and the corresponding elimination of shared values. Already, he suggests, morality 'is in the throes of an appalling crisis'.⁶⁶ If the totalization of society and the weakening of *la conscience collective* is not balanced by the development of organic solidarity through the division of labour, the change will result only in *anomie*.

Although they emphasize different aspects of the process, it is clear that Durkheim and Nietzsche are addressing the same issue. Both describe the origins of morality in the customs of communities bound together by what Durkheim called 'mechanical solidarity'. But what is, for Durkheim, the expansion of the group and the weakening of *la conscience collective*, is, for Nietzsche, the slave revolt in morals and the beginnings of European nihilism:

Refraining mutually from injury, violence, and exploitation and placing one's will on a par with someone else—this may become . . . good manners among individuals if the appropriate conditions are present (namely, if these men are actually similar in strength and value standards and belong together in *one* body). But as soon as this principle is extended, and possibly even accepted as the *fundamental principle of society*, it immediately proves to be what it really is—a will to the *denial* of life, a principle of disintegration and decay.⁶⁷

Durkheim is nervously optimistic about the totalization of society. Observing that 'there is tending to form, above European peoples, in a spontaneous fashion, a European society', he argued that even if 'the formation of one single human society is forever ruled out—and this has, however, not yet been demonstrated—at least the formation of larger societies will draw us continually closer to that goal.'⁶⁸ In contrast, Nietzsche's response is to demand a return to mechanical solidarity, not of course for everyone, but for the few strong men who can create value. Only if society is detotalized and redivided into the community of the strong and the undifferentiated mass of the weak can the conditions for value creation be sustained:

⁶⁶ *Division of Labour*, p. 339.

⁶⁷ BGE, 259.

⁶⁸ *Division of Labour*, p. 337.

As a good man, one belongs to the 'good', a community that has a communal feeling, because all the individuals are entwined together by their feeling for requital. As a bad man, one belongs to the 'bad', to a mass of abject, powerless men who have no communal feeling.⁶⁹

In this context, our reading of Nietzsche assumes additional importance. Identifying positively with any narrative (written or otherwise) means making its goals one's own. And although we may not be trying to make common cause with other readers, reading for victory has a strong centripetal dynamic: the greater our success, the more closely our goals converge with those of others who are doing the same thing. Reading Nietzsche for victory is the route to his new mechanical solidarity. In contrast, reading like losers is centrifugal. Since we are not in any sense opposed to the text, we have no common cause even with those who are reading for victory against it, we just become part of that 'mass of abject, powerless men who have no communal feeling'. Reading like a loser, in its consistent exclusion of the reader from shared value, is a willingness to exchange an exclusive communality for an inclusive and indiscriminate sociality.

Becoming part of a mass with no communal feeling may negate the ecology of value, but such a mass is not necessarily a negative ecology. Like Nietzsche, Durkheim thought of society in biological terms. His model of organic solidarity is an oak tree which can sustain 'up to two hundred species of insects that have no contacts with one another save those of good neighbourliness'.⁷⁰ Just as an environment can sustain a higher population the greater the diversity of the species within it, so society can accommodate more people if they have less in common and more diversified social roles. But whereas Durkheim's ecology is acknowledged to be part of a negative ecology of value, Nietzsche's ecology is a positive ecology of value designed to sustain species whose will to power is value positing:

society must *not* exist for society's sake but only as the foundation and scaffolding on which a choice type of being is able to raise itself to its higher task and to a higher state of *being*—comparable to those sun-seeking vines of Java . . . that so long and so often enclasp an oak tree with their tendrils

⁶⁹ *All Too Human*, 45; see also, *Genealogy*, I.11.

⁷⁰ *Division of Labour*, p. 209.

until eventually, high above it but supported by it, they can unfold their crowns in the open light and display their happiness.⁷¹

It is Nietzsche's commitment to an ecology of value that makes him an anti-social thinker. The boundaries of society must be constricted in order to sustain the flower of value. For the anti-Nietzschean, however, the argument will go the other way. The boundaries of society must be extended in order to decrease the possibility of value, for the negative ecology of value is total society.

A possibility

Nietzsche's image of the vine climbing the oak neatly encapsulated his idea that the Supermen must exercise their will to power as parasites upon society. Translating the idea into historical terms supplied Nietzsche with an extraordinary vision: 'I see in my mind's eye a possibility of a quite unearthly fascination and splendour . . . a spectacle at once so meaningful and so strangely paradoxical it would have given all the gods of Olympus an opportunity for an immortal roar of laughter—*Cesare Borgia as Pope*.⁷² Like the vine that strangles the tree as it reaches toward the sunlight, Cesare Borgia would have abolished Christianity by becoming its head.

The totalization of society does not require such fantasies, but it may involve changes for which many are unprepared. For example, one recent appeal for the ongoing totalization of society is 'The Declaration on Great Apes', which proclaims that

The notion of 'us' as opposed to 'the other', which like a more and more abstract silhouette, assumed in the course of centuries the contours of the boundaries of the tribe, of the nation, of the race, of the human species, and which for a time the species barrier had congealed and stiffened, has again become something alive, ready for further change.

The Declaration looks forward to 'the moment when the dispersed members of the chimpanzee, gorilla and orang-utan species can be liberated and lead their different lives as equals in their own special territories in our countries.'⁷³ However, neither the signatories of the Declaration, nor

⁷¹ *Good and Evil*, 258.

⁷² *Anti-Christ*, 61.

⁷³ P. Cavalieri and P. Singer, eds, *The Great Ape Project*, London 1993, p. 5 and p. 6.

subsequent advocates of simian sovereignty have specified where these simian homelands should be located. It has been suggested that some heavily indebted equatorial nation might be induced to cede part of its territory in return for relief from its creditors.⁷⁴ But within a negative ecology of value there may be other, more appropriate solutions.

Even if not undertaken with this intention, extending the boundaries of society to include members of other species is liable to devalue specifically human values, notably those of culture. Not only does it run counter to the Nietzschean argument that (super)humans, as the sole value-creating species, should live in a world that maximizes their capacity to flourish at the expense of other non-value generating species, but by including within society so many unregenerate philistines, it undermines the capacity for human culture to function as a shared value within the expanded society. In such a philistine ecology, some redundant piece of the West's cultural heritage might prove to be a suitable location for an autonomous simian group. Perhaps the Louvre, and its collections, could be put at the disposal of apes freed from zoos and research laboratories: the long galleries could be used for sleeping and recreation, the Jardin des Tuileries for foraging. Who but a Nietzschean could object?

⁷⁴ See R. E. Goodin, C. Pateman and R. Pateman, 'Simian Sovereignty', *Political Theory*, 25, 1997, pp. 821-49.

REVIEWS

Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali, *L'informatore: Silone, i comunisti e la Polizia*,

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JOHN FOOT

THE SECRET LIFE OF IGNAZIO SILONE

Ignazio Silone, best known as a remarkable writer and novelist, was born on the First of May 1900 in a small village in the Abruzzo. His real name was Secondino Tranquilli. The son of a small landowner who died when he was eleven, he became an orphan at the age of fifteen when a massive earthquake wiped out his home town in twenty-five seconds. During the First World War he became a teenage militant in the ranks of the Young Socialists, rising quickly through its ranks in the 'two red years' (*biennio rosso*) between 1919 and 1920, when he was active in Rome. When the Italian Socialists split in 1921, he became a founder member of the Italian Communist Party. Nominated to the Young Communist International, he was a frequent visitor to Berlin and Moscow, and organized Italian workers' groups in Spain, France, Belgium and Luxemburg. Within a few years, as Fascism consolidated its rule in the country, he became one of the eight top leaders of the PCI in exile, and in 1927 was sent back into Italy as head of the party's underground network. When Moscow imposed the sectarian policies of the Third Period on the Communist International at the end of the decade, a line which threatened to tear the Italian party apart, Silone was eventually expelled from the PCI for sympathies with the opposition to it.

Withdrawing from active politics after his expulsion, Silone wrote his masterpieces *Fontamara* (1933) and *Bread and Wine* (1936), two of the most powerful anti-fascist novels ever written, in Switzerland. His analytic study *School for Dictators* (1938) remains unsurpassed in the brilliance and accuracy of its dis-

section of fascism's rise to power and of Mussolini's rule. In 1941, he rejoined the Socialist Party in Zurich; he was arrested and interned by the Swiss police a year later. In October 1944 he returned to Rome, and played a leading role in the Socialist Party, opposing Nenni's alliance with the Communist Party. In 1947 he left the PSI and, as the Cold War developed, took a prominent part in the anti-communist politics of the time, contributing to the notorious symposium *The God that Failed* (1950), and creating the journal *Tempo Presente* under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, of whose Italian section he became the director. Detested as a Cold Warrior by the PCI, Silone was widely admired outside it. His *Emergency Exit* (1965), a collection of essays and testimonies on his time in the Party, became a touchstone for the non-Communist left. Continuing to write and revise his novels, Silone described himself as 'a socialist without a party, a christian without a church'. For so long a central figure in the Italian intellectual landscape, he died in 1978. For many, his life and work embodied the vicissitudes, alternately tragic and heroic, of the century.

Some ten years later, plans for an exhibition of documents about the novelist were mounted in his home town. Requests were sent to Rome for relevant materials. There a senior official of the State Archive, looking through a file devoted to Silone by the OVRA, the political police of the Fascist period, came upon two letters that he set aside from the rest of the file, which he sent on. The documents that he abstracted, he neither made public nor put back where they belonged. He removed them. In one, written in early 1930 and addressed to Emilia Bellone, sister of Guido Bellone, General Inspector of Public Security charged with stamping out subversion, the writer speaks of a deep moral and psychological crisis, and pleads to be released from 'all falsehood, doubt and secrecy', expressing a desire 'to repair the damage that I have caused, to seek redemption, to help the workers, the peasants (to whom I am bound with every fibre in my body) and my country.' No word of this document reached the outside world. But as it happened, a young historian working on a biography of Silone, Dario Biocca, was starting to come across other documents which suggested that Silone might have been a police informer between 1928 and 1930. At a conference held in Florence in 1996, Biocca for the first time aired this conclusion in public. A storm immediately broke over the allegations, which generated a huge controversy in the national press. At this juncture, a lesser official at the Archive in Rome who knew of the letter of 1930, but had neither restored it to its place nor informed Biocca of its existence, decided to release a copy to the newspaper *La Repubblica*. Not surprisingly, its publication was greeted with consternation and further furious debate. (The letter, along with other documents and a commentary, is now available in English in an article by Mauro Canali, 'Ignazio Silone and the Fascist Political Police', published in the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 5(1) 2000.)

Since then Biocca has continued his research, joined by Mauro Canali, a historian working on the Fascist secret police. The fruits of their careful and patient study of the archives, pursued amidst great hostility, are now available in the book they have jointly published, *L'informatore*. Composed of a joint introduction, a long essay by Canali on the 1919–23 period, another by Biocca covering the decade following 1924, and 117 pages of transcribed documents and explanatory notes, it is a formidable body of work which removes all doubt about the activities of Secondino Tranquilli in the twenties. The chilling truth is that Silone was an informer for the Italian secret police from 1919 to 1930. This revelation is so staggering that many still hesitate to believe it, but the evidence presented by Biocca and Canali, neither of whom has any political axe to grind, is overwhelming. The suppressed letter of 1930 establishes beyond question that 'Silvestri', a long-time informant of the police and in particular of Guido Bellone in Rome, was in fact Silone. 'Silvestri' was by far the most important spy working for the Fascist regime within the Communist movement. He also informed for far longer than any other agent. A series of smaller signs—handwriting, style, substance, numerous biographical details—confirm his identity. Silone's complicated movements in the twenties mirror those of 'Silvestri': when Silone is in Berlin, 'Silvestri' writes from Berlin; when Silone is in Paris, 'Silvestri' writes from Paris. The reports dry up after Silone was expelled from the PCI (and left active political life) in 1931. A police document from 1928, which has played a key role in convincing many previous doubters of Silone's guilt, identified Silone as a spy for the benefit of Mussolini himself. Others show that Silone was protected from arrest on a series of occasions, or given privileged treatment by the Fascist police. Much of the information provided by 'Silvestri' could only have come from within a very small group of Communist leaders. Silone himself was often left out of lists of names supplied, and on one occasion a photograph of PCI leaders sent by 'Silvestri' was reproduced and distributed to various Fascist agents, with all figures in the frame except that of Silone (the photograph, together with others supplied by 'Silvestri', is reproduced in *L'informatore*).

What was the content of the information Silone was sending for over a decade to the State Police and (after 1922) to those employed under Mussolini's regime? Much of it is generic material, as in all police-informant reports, in this case bearing on political debates within the PCI and Socialist movement, and relationships with the USSR. But much else is specific delation of individuals. 'Silvestri' provides photographs of militants; he indicates when activists from the underground will be moving across borders and under what false names; he identifies addresses and secret printing presses; he draws maps; he describes people. Such information led to swift repression and arrests. In 1923 'Silvestri' told the police: 'Yesterday evening Mauro Scoccimarro left for Italy via Switzerland. He has a passport under the name of the Neapolitan Communist

Vergili, upon which he has substituted his photograph.' Almost immediately, the authorities were able to circulate the following message to every prefect in Italy: 'The noted Communist Mauro Scoccimarro will return into Italy via Switzerland with a passport under the name of Virgili or Vergili (from Naples) upon which he has substituted his own photo. Investigate and arrest the subject if the passport has been changed.' Biocca and Canali cite numerous other examples in *L'informatore*, and further documents will certainly emerge from the archives. The evidence also seems to suggest that 'Silvestri' was aware of fellow collaborators working within the Communist movement and helped warn them of possible discovery. The conclusion is inescapable: Silone was almost certainly invaluable in the detection and depletion of the Communist and anti-Fascist networks built up across Europe in the twenties.

How have Silone's admirers reacted to these discoveries? In the initial rush to defend him, the documents found in the archives were denounced as forgeries, which could only have been planted in the files by the Fascist authorities themselves, with the aim of discrediting him. But as more and more evidence came to light, the idea that the OVRA had created folders full of sophisticated forgeries in the thirties waiting to be discovered (and then hidden, and then released) by future generations, had to be abandoned. Many who were initially sceptical now accept that 'Silvestri' was, in fact, Silone. But for others the psychological shock is so great that they simply 'refuse to believe' that Silone could possibly have been a spy. Indro Montanelli, a leading liberal commentator, had declared he would not believe it even if Silone were to reappear and tell him it was so to his face. The Socialist historian Giuseppe Tamburrano, biographer of Nenni, has tried to counter-attack with what Canali has described as 'a poorly executed form of collage of random documents found in Silone's file' from the mid-thirties, with some success in recruiting others to his cause, the latest being none other than Norberto Bobbio, in a letter to *La Repubblica* of 5 May 2000.

The single serious issue raised by Silone's supporters concerns the fate of his younger brother, Romolo Tranquilli. The only one of Silone's five siblings to survive childhood illness and the earthquake, Romolo was arrested by the police in 1928 on suspicion of participation in a bungled bomb-attack against the King in Milan, which left eighteen bystanders dead. Silone, who was devoted to his brother, tried to intervene on his behalf with the Fascist authorities. Various 'official' Silone publications have glossed this as the only reason for his having been in touch with the OVRA. Thus Bruno Falchetto, introducing the 1998 edition of Silone's *Collected Works*, *Ignazio Silone. Romanzi e saggi, 1927-1944*, writes: 'We cannot exclude the possibility that contacts were made for a time, between 1928 and 1930, with Emilio (sic) Bellone, head of the special office of the political police of the Interior Ministry. [But] these contacts would seem definitely linked to attempts to explore every avenue and try and help young "Romolotto".' A somewhat more ingenious version of the same line of argument

can be found in Ottorino Gurgo and Francesco de Core's 1998 hagiography *Silone: L'avventura di un uomo libero*, which devotes just three pages out of its nearly five hundred to the charges against Silone, suggesting that he had a plan 'to make the OVRA believe that he was their informer in order to obtain the liberation of Romolo or, at the very least, an improvement in his terrible conditions in prison.' This desperate effort to reinvent Silone's activities as a heroic triple game holds no water. For not only is there ample evidence that 'Silvestri' was in communication with Bellone well before 1928, but it was the issue of Romolo that led the OVRA to identify Silone as an informer to Mussolini himself. Biocca and Canali's account turns the whole question on its head. What they show is that it may have been the tragedy of his younger brother that finally forced Silone to cut his ties with Bellone. Romolo was tortured by the Fascists, cleared of the attentat against the King, but sentenced to twelve years imprisonment as a Communist. He died in jail from pneumonia in 1932. Silone's 'moral and psychological crisis' could well have had its origins here.

His brother's ordeal, however, leaves the problem of Silone's role in the PCI after 1929 unanswered. His activities in the Third Period have always seemed ambiguous. He appeared to support neither those Communists who resisted the Soviet doctrine that social democrats were no better than 'social fascists', nor the PCI leaders who implemented Stalin's line. After a long period of this 'double game', Silone was expelled from the Party in 1931. How are we to understand his role in the light of the revelations about him? Was he intent on provoking his own expulsion, to escape from the 'falsehood, doubt and secrecy' of his letter to Bellone in 1930? Or was he deliberately prolonging the internal conflict in the PCI to damage the Party? We cannot be sure; maybe he was doing both at once. What is clear is that 'Silvestri' stopped reporting to Rome in 1930. When he was expelled from the PCI the following year, Silone withdrew from politics altogether and underwent an analysis by Carl Jung in Zurich. His apparently bizarre and solitary 'dissent' had allowed him to escape from the grip of the PCI and the OVRA at the same time.

Much remains to be explored in this period of Silone's life. But the weight of evidence on display is now such that defenders of his reputation, after half-hearted attempts to block the publication of *L'informatore*, are now very much on the back foot. Biocca's forthcoming full-length biography of Silone should provide a more complete picture. Meanwhile, the enigma that remains unresolved is the question of motive. What lay behind Silone's decade of betrayals? Retrospectively, we can read in his fiction signs of an inner turmoil that bear on his other life. The confession of a young militant befriended by a policeman and turned into an informer in chapter 25 of *Bread and Wine* could reflect something of his own 'recruitment'. The themes of *The Fox* (1934), published in Italy in 1958, and the play *And He Hides Himself* (1944), are spying and treachery. The historian Mimmo Franzinelli mentions an unpublished work (held in the

Silone archive) called *Il Dossier*, in which an anti-Fascist Minister of the Interior re-reads his own life through the police records of the Fascist period, as if Silone knew that one day he would be unmasked. 'In my solitary brooding, that left me not a moment's peace,' confesses the spy in *Bread and Wine*,

I passed from fear of punishment to fear of non-punishment. The idea that I was haunted by the wrong I had done only because of the continual risk of being found out began to frighten me. So I began to wonder whether, if better technique enabled one to betray one's friends with the certainty that one would never be found out, that would make it more supportable . . . So might technique be capable of destroying the distinction between right and wrong, by eliminating the risk of punishment? The idea frightened me.

As Adriano Sofri wrote in *La Repubblica* on 15 April 2000: 'One re-reads all of Silone, and one thinks: how could we not have seen it before?' Biocca and Canali, too, invite us to look within Silone's fiction for the unravelling of his secrets. Indeed, Biocca says, it was a close study of *Bread and Wine* that first led him to suspect the truth. Certainly, reading works like *Fontamara* will never be quite the same again.

But literary clues, suggestive though they may be, can only take us so far. Historical evidence for Silone's motivation in becoming an agent of the secret police still remains too thin for any confident answers. He was very young when he embarked on his career as an informer, only nineteen. From childhood he would have been psychologically fragile; maybe he needed money to support his family in the Abruzzo. Certainly he was paid for his betrayals over a decade, on occasion even, it would seem, bargaining for more generous pieces of silver. He began to inform on the socialist movement before Mussolini came to power, and his reports to the political police, whose personnel was largely continuous before and after the March on Rome, reveal little ideological commitment to Fascism later. If he was tempted by the glamour or power of the regime in the twenties, there is no clear sign of it. He does express extreme hostility to the leadership of the PCI by 1930, and was certainly a violent anti-Communist after 1945, so it is just possible that he was driven by hatred of the revolutionary left from the start (in 1919 the PSI was still an insurrectionary party). But this would require some dramatic teenage conversion, of which we know nothing.

What is clear is that at the centre of the mystery lies his relationship with Bellone. What was the bond between 'Silvestri' and his controller, the 'gentlemanly' interlocutor for whom he expresses his respect in 1930? Bellone went to visit Silone abroad, convinced his informant to continue when he was wavering in 1924, and tried to dissuade him from quitting in 1930. There is no hint of blackmail in the documents, and it is striking that the regime did not expose Silone in the thirties, when his novels had become very effective weapons against it. Bellone himself retired in 1936, eventually dying in a lunatic asylum

in 1948. Documents show the Fascist authorities were not indifferent to Silone's fame, but they took no action against him. Could Bellone initially have protected him? These are at best speculations. What is clear is that once Silone had begun to inform, it was very difficult (and dangerous) to stop, and that the price he had to pay for ending his duplicity was high, a complete detachment from political activism. For someone whose whole adult life had been lived within the labour movement, this was a traumatic decision, which led to a kind of psychological breakdown. Out of it came the distinguished writer and pillar of anti-fascism the world has thought it knew ever since. Beyond the factual mystery of the reasons for Silone's service as a spy for the regime, the psychological mystery of his emergence from it as a literary-ethical phoenix is yet greater.

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Francis Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time: Essays in Cultural Politics*
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DECLAN KIBERD

THE VIEW FROM ENNISKILLEN

In *Towards 2000* Raymond Williams considered a socialist future in which old notions of territory and sovereignty might be undone. Francis Mulhern justly observes that, although the significant societies of today are either larger or smaller than the nation-state, it nonetheless persists as the site of despatch. Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, more and more nations have clamoured for the right to recognition which is embodied in some form of state. This is but one sense in which Mulhern's present lasts a long time. The current situation persists, but only as a travesty of William's imagined future. The most one can do is survey the botched narrative with pessimism of intellect, optimism of will. Such stoicism makes for a remarkable diagnostic coherence in these disparate essays, which trace the history of intellectuals in many places, most notably Britain and Ireland.

If some things never change, others have been transformed beyond recognition. Over the past three decades the welfare state in Britain has been dismantled as a touchstone of political legitimacy, much as the teaching authority of the Catholic Church has been shattered in the Republic of Ireland. That analogy is not as far-fetched as it might seem, since the Church was used by an impoverished, insecure state to provide social services and thus a political stability beyond that state's own material potential: but Mulhern prefers to think of Irish clericalism as uniformly reactionary. He emigrated to Britain just before a gospel of liberation theology was imported back to Ireland by nuns, priests and lay workers. He has accordingly slender knowledge of the ways in which his own devastating critique of Celtic Tiger economics has been endorsed by those clergy who form the core of current oppositional thought in Ireland. Instead, he must

write that 'the oppressive clericalism of official Southern culture has confirmed, by negation, the value of development in itself, the general critical appeal of the "modern".' That sentence might still say something valid about the conservative *nostra* of Northern Irish Catholicism (whose archbishop recently denounced the speaking of eulogies by lay persons at funerals) but it would hardly fit the Southern community which, as far back as 1972, voted to remove references to the special position of the Catholic Church from its Constitution.

The truth is that the island has long been a two-stroke society: and it is in Northern rather than Southern Ireland that the present lasts longest of all. With the ceasefires by the IRA, there is at last the chance of reopening the civil rights agenda of 1968—a thing worth doing, for which Mulhern advances a strong case here. But meanwhile, in the South, a strange version of the revolution longed for by Williams has already been achieved, two years short of 2000. In May 1998 over 94 percent of the electorate in the Republic voted to endorse the Belfast Agreement, which effectively overrode the 1937 Constitution from that moment on. In doing so, the people did what no other people in modern history has done: for the sake of good relations with their Unionist neighbours on the island, they voted to reduce the extent of their national territory, rescinding the claim made in 1937 on six northern counties. If constitutions are written in the language of the nineteenth century, revolving around concepts of sovereignty and boundaries, this was a gesture out of the twenty-first century, a recognition that identities are overlapping and dialogic and that it is now possible to be 'Irish or British or both'. One of the problems faced by the framers of the Belfast Agreement is that there is no readily available language in which to give legal expression to these insights other than the constitutional discourses of the nineteenth century: but they did their best in the circumstances. Other eventualities may flow from their formulation: the possibility that people in Northern Ireland might vote representatives to the Dáil as well as Westminster and even, in due time, remit taxes to their chosen state.

Williams's hopes for the denationalization of identities have been realized in the Republic, but without any triumph for socialism. Instead, as Mulhern acidly remarks, the new post-nation is imagined less as a domain of cultural sovereignty than as a market. What socialism couldn't bring about has come instead through capital: 'The nation as market, the market as youth, youth as the spirit of the new nation: this festive ring-dance of meanings is Irish capital's rite of spring.' And the vibrant, cash-rich South uses gloom-laden memoirs of the mid-twentieth century much as British welfarism once employed *The Uses of Literacy*—as a way of marking off its modernity and of preening itself on just how far it has come in the few short decades since the days of *Angela's Ashes*. For nothing ever seems more remote to the Irish mind than the recent past. The beehive hards of the 1950s are as anti-aphrodisiac as the dog-collared bucolic priests of Mulhern's Northern youth, yet somehow necessary to prove that the

place in which they are still found is really and truly modern. In that sense, there is a useful corrective to Celtic Tiger euphoria in Mulhern's title.

His diagnosis is often persuasive, his remedies less immediately clear. Those critics who have tried to construct a method calibrated to Irish conditions have long ago been written off by Mulhern as little more than old-style nationalists in drag. Their project he deems futile (though it is the project underlying the series in which this volume appears): 'Ireland is different. But in relation to what putatively normal society? There is none. Ireland is different, and in that respect the same as anywhere else.' Yet, though that sounds clever, it is hardly true to experience: for many decades everyone in Ireland was brought up to regard English culture and society as some kind of human norm, against which they were the *errata*, the oddities. The Leavisian programme worked far better in Ireland than it ever did in England (which may explain why Mulhern was enabled to write the best book on the 'moment' of *Scrutiny*). It is only in very recent years that Irish intellectuals have broken out of this perceptual prison and made a wider set of comparisons, in terms of which England is shown to be a strangely stressed society, exhausted by the burden of empire and its aftermath. Far from being normal, England was very odd.

In 1996 it became clear that the per capita income of Irish citizens was about to surpass that of British subjects, but the moment went largely unremarked among a people too busy for self-congratulation and among an intelligentsia too troubled by other questions. Mulhern is now a rather unfashionable figure in his continuing attempt to locate most of his analyses along an Anglo-Irish axis, yet his project has much to recommend it. One thing which it reveals very clearly is the fact that, as the Republic enters a post-national phase, England is returning to confront its long-deferred national question. Here, Mulhern's analysis of the meaning of Leavis and Williams is wonderfully acute. Leavis resented the dissolution of Englishness into a wider British imperial scheme. he was a liberal, as opposed to a Powellite, defender of a sturdy little England, whose writers, though feminine in sensitivity, were also possessed of manly qualities of flint and iron. In a period when international writers were walking in hobnailed boots all over the English language, he tried to defend and distil the essence of that Englishness in an account of *The Great Tradition*. Mulhern's is surely the most cogent analysis of Leavis, but it needs some updating. The huge interest in Irish plays in contemporary London (over twenty were on the boards in the summer of 1999) may be attributable less to the brilliance of the dramatists than to the ways in which many of their plays permit English audiences, at a certain safe remove, to explore their still-burning national question. The spirit of Tom Nairn is alive in the West End as well as at Granta Books. Mulhern, in shaking Irish dust off his feet in 1975 and decamping to a life of metropolitan Marxism, may have felt that he was removing himself from contamination by a noxious nationalism, only to find that history has given him a back-kick. He managed to escape

Ireland's seemingly unresolved national question, only to encounter England's in its most eloquent form: the Cambridge scrutineer.

Chastened by these experiences, he offers his analysis. Like it or not, more people seem willing to die for nation than for social class, and 'the nation-state is where all of us are all of the time'. Well, maybe, but in Middlesex more than in Moygashel. In Ireland today those who sponsor even a liberal-humanist version of nationalist narrative in the Republic's newspapers get short enough shrift. Witness the ferocious response to the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* of 1991. It was seen as an example of one 'backward' narrative—the monotonous, Northern, nationalist one—interfering with a more 'modern' plot—the Europeanizing, market-driven consumerist option. Mulhern joined in the attack on that occasion, perhaps getting his signals a little crossed. He reprints his essays from that controversy here (but without Luke Gibbons's rejoinders, thereby conveying the impression that he is fighting with shadows, like those revisionist historians who, in their assaults on the 1916 Rising, rarely rebut the case which the Easter rebels made but rather the one which they claim was made). Fifteen years of metro-Marxism had led Mulhern to the infallible conclusion that all nationalist projects are necessarily bourgeois. 'The only crucial test of a bourgeois party', he sagely observes, 'is whether it can create a secure and fertile environment for capital.' By 1991, however, the Southern elite was well embarked on that programme and wanted no truck with Field Day's civic nationalism, much less its utopian socialism. The failure of its general editor, Seamus Deane, to employ a single female editor was pounced on as a pretext for rubbishing the project. A fair criticism the feminist critique surely was. But to have advanced thinkers like Mulhern throw their weight behind an even wider rejection must have left the gnomes of Dublin laughing up their sleeves at the willingness of international Marxism to proof the new consumerist order against attack from those revolutionary national traditions which it was quietly liquidating. 1991, as it happened, was also the year in which the Dublin government failed to invite the five surviving veterans of the Easter Rising to its furtive, apologetic and by then utterly perfunctory commemoration.

Mulhern, to be fair to him, shows his awareness that anti-nationalism scarcely amounts to a method, being more a pathology, and that it can lead to 'a posture of quietism or cynical indulgence towards unionism and state policy, North and South'. The failure of the Southern state to implement the social-democratic programme of the Easter Proclamation (which promised 'to cherish all the children of the nation equally') would have been manifest enough to any serious student of the *Field Day Anthology* (even if the offence against women was compounded in that act of diagnosis). That Mulhern should, despite his strictures, find a home for his essays in a Field Day series is but a further demonstration that civic nationalism, for all its flaws, may be more open to auto-critique than other forms of politics, whether communist or Unionist.

One of the sources of confusion in Mulhern's analysis was his assumption that the Irish intelligentsia, like the English one, functions as an extension of the establishment. His brilliant treatment here of 'Intelligentsias and Their Histories' shows how differently they order these things in France, where the *écrivain(e) engagé(e)* has more often been oppositional to the entire system. The Irish case is of real interest (as in so many other instances) because of its ambiguity. Certainly, the revivalist generation led by W. B. Yeats saw itself as setting up a national theatre in opposition to the forces of colonial occupation, but after independence in 1922 things got more complex as British models (resisted for so long) began to take hold. Hence the conflicted career of a Flann O'Brien, serving at once as the senior civil servant Brian Ó Nualláin and as satirist-in-chief of the new order under the pseudonym Myles na Gopaleen. Mulhern mistakenly identified the civic nationalism of Deane, Gibbons and others as somehow reflective of the interests of the Southern elite, but in fact they were intent on using the texts of the oppositional tradition in order to expose the mediocrity of the present. It was another Benjaminite case of past history flashing forth again as a moment of danger: and it is to the credit of these scholars that they have forgiven those who helped to snuff that project out.

Mulhern is, nonetheless, right to be sceptical of many of the received forms of Irish nationalism: but most of these are now so wan and enfeebled as to be scarcely deserving of his attention. Metropolitan Marxists have sounded enough warnings against a nationalism which may conceal reactionary agendas beneath the trendy gear of Third World resistance. What might now be given more serious consideration is the increasing propensity of certain forms of Unionism to redefine themselves in Marxian language (but without any application of the accompanying economic theory). A cynic talking into a mobile phone in Dublin might see this as a case of the invincible fascination which dying creeds hold for one another (a recent graffito in Dublin's favourite yuppie pub read 'Ulster is British—let's keep it that way'), but one thing is surely clear. The Ulster Unionist Party has not passed Mulhern's test of keeping that state safe for capital: and in Belfast the Field Day critique looks even more radical than it does in Dublin. Yet this is a bracing book. One benefit of Mulhern's essayistic method is that, despite the underlying rigour of his analyses, the individual pieces always leave room for debate. A long, beautifully written opening meditation by Mulhern on his childhood and schooling in Enniskillen helps to situate the recurrent concerns of his subsequent career, tracked in the articles that follow. Whether they deal with the English reception of Marxist theory, the method of socialist autobiography favoured by Hoggart and Williams, the reading of Althusser or current theories of translation, they offer some of the finest 'thinking about thinking' to appear in recent years.

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FROM FLORENCE TO MOSCOW

The posthumous publication of Louis Althusser's reflections on Machiavelli offers an unsettling occasion to return to both thinkers. If we except the more limited cases of Della Volpe and Colletti, Althusser was the only figure in the Western Marxist tradition to engage with a number of the classics of Western political theory. But his writings on Montesquieu, Rousseau and Hegel—remarkable, even at times coruscating, as they could be—were still beholden to the idea that such theorists might be judged by how closely they came to anticipating the discoveries of historical materialism. His unpublished text on Machiavelli, dating from a later period, exhibits a different spirit. Here relations are if anything reversed—the Florentine figured as a more radical and original theorist than any successor in the Communist tradition. According to his pupil Emmanuel Terray, he once confessed that Machiavelli was 'without doubt the author who has most fascinated me, much more so than Marx'.

Althusser began to sketch lectures on Machiavelli in 1962, less than a year after a formative first encounter while on holiday in Italy; a draft took shape around 1971–2 in preparation for another course, and was largely completed by 1975. This version was periodically revised up through the mid-eighties, but left unpublished at his death in 1990. Overtly, none of the major events of post-war Communism left any mark on these pages. De-Stalinization, the Sino-Soviet split, the Cultural Revolution, May 1968, Eurocommunism are visible only through extremely oblique allusions. Unmistakeably, however, Althusser intended *Machiavelli and Us*—his own title—as a philosophical reflection on the short 20th century defined by the legacy of the Russian Revolution.

Only indirectly topical, the text is also only subliminally exegetical. Althusser not only avoids conventional quotation from Machiavelli. Even more conspicuously he ignores nearly all of the great multinational landmarks of 20th century Machiavelli scholarship. It seems likely that Althusser came to know of this body of work only when he read *Le Travail de l'œuvre*, a massive study of Machiavelli by Claude Lefort published in 1972 which discusses a number of scholars—Gerhard Ritter, Rene Koenig, Ernst Cassirer, and Leo Strauss amongst others—far removed from the French intellectual scene of the time. The only influence he acknowledges, if still somewhat perfunctorily, is Gramsci. His own glosses are often cavalier, scanting issues others have reflected on more clearly and carefully. Althusser's philological indifference finds revealing expression in his comment that Machiavelli can only be made interesting if he is 'utterly transformed' by reading his ideas in the light of contemporary concerns.

The primary concern of Althusser's study is to establish Machiavelli's significance as a unique figure in the history of philosophy. His central claim is that Machiavelli's writings inaugurated a completely original materialism—one that is neither a monistic ontology, nor a claim about the primacy of the economic in history, not even in the last instance. More captiously, Machiavelli is defined as a materialist because he is a theorist of 'concrete conjunctures', who brings concealed vectors of strategic action to light, exposing the immanent possibilities of the present as a moment in history. 'Matter' under this meaning is too complex and ductile to allow for any general laws: it is simply the ungrounded, emergent causality of open-ended transitions.

Marxists have classically argued that historical materialism is the science of the systemic compulsions and counter-finalities of the struggle between groups fought out under conditions of scarcity. Although in the whole tradition of Western Marxism there was no one who had a more positive view of science, Althusser actually subscribed to an extremely modest view of the knowledge that a Marxist science of history could offer; as a field of contradiction and overdetermination, history was a process structured only in a distant last instance by economic modes of production. Here, however, dismissing the stereotype of Machiavelli as the founder of a coldly realistic analytics of power, Althusser tacitly relinquishes his own distinctive conception of class struggles too. For the flux of conjunctures now precludes any law-like regularities. What Machiavelli offers us instead is an art of thinking focussed wholly on the conditions of undertaking tasks immediately to hand, without anchorage in any underlying movement of history: a supposedly deeper, albeit more unstable kind of knowledge. The purpose of his rhetorical construction of exemplary cases was, Althusser argues, to offer a repertoire of scenarios for transformative agency. This was an optic designed for sharp focus on those faint interstitial possibilities that only become 'events' through great, improbable awakenings of the down-and-out. Indeed,

according to Althusser, the problem which defined the horizon of Machiavelli's thought was how a new political order could be established in wholly unfavourable circumstances. The utopian energy of his writing springs from an impasse: while the possibilities of a new state were being realized elsewhere in Europe in the form of absolutism, the Italian city-state was unable to reinvent itself on the enlarged national scale necessary for a successful transition to capitalism.

But despite the fact that the examples and distinctions deployed in his texts are often embedded in the contentions of a distant era, Machiavelli remains actual today as the inventor of a new genre of writing about politics, whose potential has yet to be grasped. The most significant moments in his work speak to an interlocutor who is not ultimately a valorous individual, but rather the masses whose possibilities of agency are represented in the form of such a figure. Machiavelli's writings establish roles for potential actors on the political stage and interpellate subjects who will play out those roles. It is the presence of these empty spaces, to be read and occupied by anonymous partisan subjects, that make it so difficult to decipher the agendas lurking beneath his deceptively clear prose. This indeterminacy is constitutive and ineradicable. By way of parables, stories of the concrete, Machiavelli broke out of the generalizing format of the classical treatise, and invented the prototype of the manifesto. The rhetorical novelty of the latter is that it is a text which inserts itself into the space of agency that it has itself identified. Machiavelli, unlike Marx, leaves these spaces open: more cognizant of the aleatory dialectic of political conflict, he does not seal them with any ideological closure. Machiavelli addresses the masses via the silhouette of a resolute ruler only because, conceived in that form, decisive action can begin at any time. The Prince, unlike the proletariat, is 'the pure possibility of the event', 'agency out of the void', 'absolute new beginning'. Machiavelli's writings analyse 'the conditions of an impossible event', blasting open the continuum of history. It is as if we overhear at this point an uncanny, voluntarist echo of Benjamin.

Shifting from the plane of this unearthly general 'materialism', Althusser's text moves to a more specific question, the object of a long-standing controversy, to which he returns an over-coded answer. How is it possible to reconcile Machiavelli the patnotic republican with Machiavelli the counsellor of princes? Althusser argues that there is no conflict between the political agenda of *The Prince* and that of the *Discourses* because the former simply explores the violent agency required to found a new state which will, over the course of time, eventually become the national-republican polity which Machiavelli was ultimately aiming for. Here Althusser develops Gramsci's idea that Machiavelli was, even as a counsellor to princes, a proto-Jacobin attempting to shape the construction of an emergent popular will by pointing out courses of appropriate action to those for whom this could never be a conscious goal. *The Prince* is the handbook for a would-be founder of a new state, who must work alone, purging and liqui-

dating his enemies. The *Discourses*, by contrast, offer a more panoramic vision of the longer-term work of incorporating the masses into the new state through laws, and mobilizing them through representative institutions.

By this account *The Prince* is the more 'revolutionary' of the two works because it lays bare the violence involved in the foundation of the new state, and gazes unperturbed at the horrors of this origin. Unlike theorists of natural law and the social contract, who saw consent at the origins of government, Machiavelli was 'a man who, even before all the ideologists blocked out reality with their stories, was capable not just of living, or tolerating, but of thinking the violence of the birth-throes of the state.' In this sense Machiavelli was not a theorist of political conjunctures in general, but of a particular, recurring phenomenon: the traumatic revolutionary moment of 'primitive political accumulation'. This is what a return to the 'absolute beginning' means: the restoration of the primordial vulnerability and plasticity of human beings. But Machiavelli's insights extended further. For he saw the necessity of building up a new citizen-army not just as a condition of survival in the predatory world of war and diplomacy, but also as a way to liquidate old social hierarchies and fuse new groups. It is in this context, Althusser suggests, that we should grasp the significance of Machiavelli's notorious, unfairly ridiculed belief in the superiority of infantry to cavalry and artillery. What underlay this conviction was a vision of epic mass mobilizations, comprehensively subordinating animal and mechanical power to human purposes.

These are inventive notations, if marred—as so often in Althusser—by the absence of any controlled exegesis. Nonetheless many of the points on which they turn are contestable. The claim that Machiavelli was a theorist of the conditions of absolutist state formation in the early modern transition from feudalism to capitalism is not plausible. For his conception of the state so emphatically accentuated the personality of the ruler or ruling body that it failed to capture or anticipate the dual nature of early modern Absolutism, characterized at once by a hypostasization of the figure of the monarch, and an incipient depersonalization—'bureaucratization'—of the structure of feudal jurisdiction. Likewise, his strenuous attachment to a citizen militia stood in stark opposition to the whole pattern of absolutist state formation. These discrepancies between Tuscan concerns and European trends found repeated expression in his judgements of contemporary politics. Machiavelli had no premonition of the impending involution of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, whose ornate medieval federalism he viewed in a highly positive light. France, the early modern state that loomed largest for him, he esteemed not for its absolutism—which had not yet really taken shape—but as a kingdom based on a legal framework of estates representation. The Swiss Federation, which he admired in Tacitean fashion as an intact relic of ancient Teutonic simplicity, was the polar antithesis of Renaissance proto-absolutism. In his critique of *The*

Prince written more than two centuries later, Frederick the Great of Prussia showed without difficulty how remote Machiavelli was from any understanding of the territorial scale, institutional architecture and aristocratic ethos of the dynastic world of absolutism, an order everywhere erected on the foundations of a quiescent and unarmed populace of peasants and burghers.

It is clear, however, that behind Althusser's claim that Machiavelli can be seen as a theorist of emergent absolutism, understood as the resolution of the problem of state formation in the epoch of transition from feudalism to capitalism, lay an obsessive contemporary projection. Throughout *Machiavelli and Us*, Althusser's ultimate theme was plainly a problematic from his own time—the foundation and evolution of the Soviet Union, as the state form of a transition from capitalism to socialism. This was the conjuncture that defined the horizon of world politics for him. Machiavelli's quotation from Virgil in *The Prince* could in this light be read as a maxim of an emergency regime attempting against all odds to build socialism in one country: 'Harsh necessity, and the fact that my kingdom is new, oblige me to do these things and amass armies on the frontiers.'

Appeal to the authority of such Latin precedent is pervasive in Machiavelli. It raises a perennial question. What is the significance of the classical world in his thought? Was it an expedient cover concealing an entirely new structure of thought, or did he actually seek to restore an ancient political prudence? Althusser's modernization of Machiavelli is no isolated act of force. It reflects a recurrent pattern in reception of the Florentine. Gramsci's interpretation of him as a precursor of Saint-Just poses some of the same problems. Was Machiavelli then forced to represent the prosaic content of the emerging absolutist state in 'Roman costume and with Roman slogans', as Marx said the Jacobins had done, in order 'to maintain their enthusiasm at the high level appropriate to great historical tragedy'? In this light, Machiavelli could be seen as the founding father of a bourgeois revolutionary ideology. But if this were the case, he would be a figure of limited relevance in approaching the problems of a proletarian revolution, an enterprise that, according to Marx, no longer needs to cloak its objectives in robes borrowed from a mythical past. Gramsci, representing the disciplined collective parties of the Third International as a 'New Prince', discontinuous in nature from the old, in his own way acknowledged this. A classical frame of reference is not out of place in his portrait of Machiavelli.

Althusser's image of Machiavelli, as seer into a farther Stalinist distance, faces more radical difficulties. By the mid-seventies, he had little or no attachment to what had become of the USSR. In Machiavelli he wanted to find the shapes of an alternative history, encompassing the need for a moment of founding violence as Lenin accepted it, but modulating towards a different, less murderous and conservative outcome than the regime built by Stalin. Hence the two-stage theory he puts forward to resolve the apparent conflict of political

purpose between *The Prince* and the *Discourses*—the former is to the violent foundation of the new state, what the latter is to its duration and eventual ‘democratization’. But this schema does not capture the spirit of the *Discourses*, often mistakenly thought to be less ferocious in their representation of politics. Although he notes that the distinction between the two fundamental types of regime Machiavelli theorizes—principality and republic—more or less collapses as he moves to the climactic middle of his free-wheeling ‘commentary’ on Livy’s history of the origins and later development of the Roman Republic, Althusser does not recognize the problem this poses for his interpretation of the difference between the two texts.

For what it suggests is the fluidity and imprecision of the names we give to regimes and the fierce tyrannical core of any *pouvoir constituant*, which manifests itself not just at the outset of a new state but also in periodic conditions of emergency. It is in the *Discourses* that Machiavelli writes: ‘he who proposes to set up an absolute power, or what writers call a tyranny, must renovate everything.’ He is not pointing to an evil to be thwarted by civic republicans, but to figures by no means viewed as execrable despots—coolly suggesting the example of the Biblical King David ‘who filled the hungry with good things and the rich sent empty away’. He who wishes to make a new beginning must be ready ‘to build new cities, to destroy those already built, and to move the inhabitants from one place to another far distant from it; in short to leave nothing of that province intact, and nothing in it, neither rank, nor institution, nor form of government, nor wealth, except it be held by such as recognize that it comes from you.’ He concedes that ‘such methods are exceedingly cruel and are repugnant to any community, not just a Christian one, but to any composed of men’, but excludes any alternative. The most sacred figures of the Christian tradition could not do otherwise. ‘He who reads the Bible judiciously will see that Moses was forced, in order that his laws and orders should prosper, to massacre innumerable human beings who, moved by nothing but envy, opposed his designs.’

Biblical examples, of course, weighed less for Machiavelli, who was prepared to envisage the end of Christianity as an all-purpose moral code, than the experience of the Roman Republic. It is this that Althusser seems to have had in mind when thinking of the Soviet Union. But here too his two-stage solution to the apparent opposition of *The Prince* and the *Discourses* shows its limits, since there was no one founder of the Roman Republic, whose political structure emerged out of a continuous sequence of innovative acts, few or none exempt from force. Machiavelli’s conception of the violence of beginnings must be put into historical perspective. He was after all no revolutionary in the modern sense of the word. His vision of history was cyclical, every epoch ending in the same drastic puncture: ‘when every province is replete with inhabitants who can neither obtain a livelihood nor move elsewhere since all other places are occupied and full up, and when the craftiness and malignity of man has gone as far as it

can go, the world must be purged in one of these three ways [floods, pestilence, famine] so that humankind being reduced to comparatively few and humbled by adversity, may adopt a more appropriate form of life and grow better.'

Machiavelli was a theorist of transitions, of fresh beginnings, but the opposite of a utopian. He never imagined the possibility of something truly new: a progressive amelioration of scarcity, bringing a universal emancipation through the transformation of nature. Like Goethe's Mephistopheles he was an old-world devil, who hoped only to unleash virtuous cycles of conflict, negation and liberty, fully realizing that they would eventually become vicious cycles. The nature of the race did not allow otherwise: 'By nature there is nothing we cannot long for, but by fortune we are such that of these things we can attain but few. The result is that the human mind is perpetually discontented, and of its possessions, is apt to grow weary. This makes it find fault with the present, praise the past and long for the future, though for its doing so no rational cause can be assigned.' But his reflections on this dismal sequence are infused with a sense of gallows humour. He declined to see it as a tragedy. Althusser's memorial on Machiavelli traces, in its plunge to indeterminacy and contingency, the dissolution of his own theoretical system, on the eve of the historical disappearance of its practical referent. He dismissed the satirical side of Machiavelli from sight. But this is the legacy that may count most for any future Enlightenment. If Marxism is to play its role in the daybreak to another era of upheavals, it will have to be a gay science.